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CHARLOTTE'S INHERITANCE

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "BIRDS OF PREY,"

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON

WARD, LOCK, AND TYLER

WARWICK HOUSE, PATERNOSTER ROW

1863

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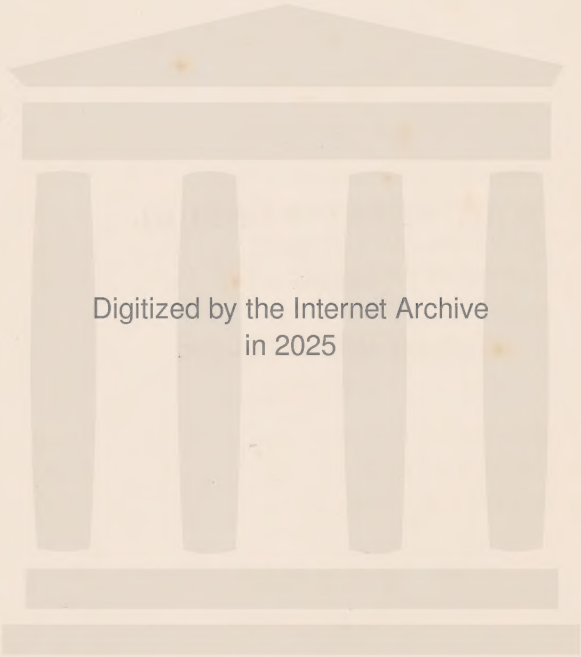
TO

MRS. HENRY EMANUEL,

WITH THE

AUTHOR'S SINCERE REGARDS.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Book the First.

DE PROFUNDIS.

CHAPTER I.

LENOBLE OF BEAUBOCAGE.

In the days when a Bourbon reigned over Gaul, before the "simple, sensuous, passionate" verse of Alfred de Musset had succeeded the *débonnaire* Muse of Béranger in the affections of young France,—in days when the site of the Trocadero was a remote and undiscovered country, and the word "exposition" unknown in the Academic dictionary, and the Gallic Augustus destined to rebuild the city yet an exile,—a young law-student boarded, in common with other students, in a big dreary-looking house at the corner of the Rue Grande-Mademoiselle, abutting on the Place Lauzun, and within some ten minutes' walk of the Luxembourg. It was a very dingy quarter, though noble gentlemen and lovely ladies had once occupied the great ghastly mansions, and

disported themselves in the gruesome gardens. But the young students were in nowise oppressed by the ghastliness of their abode. They sang their Béranger, and they pledged each other in cheap Bordeaux, and clinked their glasses noisily in their boisterous good-fellowship, and ate the messes compounded for them in a darksome cupboard, known as the kitchen, by old Nanon the cook, purblind, stone-deaf, and all but imbecile, and popularly supposed to be the venerable mother of Madame Magnotte. The youngsters grumbled to each other about the messes when they were unusually mysterious; and it must be owned that there were *vol-au-vents* and *fricandeaux* consumed in that establishment which were awful and wonderful in their nature; but they ventured on no complaint to the mistress of the mansion. She was a grim and terrible personage. Her terms were low, and she treated her boarders *de haute en bas*. If they were not content with her viands, they might go and find more agreeable viands elsewhere.

Madame Magnotte was altogether mysterious

and inscrutable. Some people said that she was a countess, and that the wealth and lands of her family had been confiscated by the committee of public unsafety in '93. Others declared that she had been a popular actress in a small theatre in the days of Napoleon. She was tall and thin,—nay, of an exceptional leanness,—and her complexion was of a more agreeable yellow than the butter that appeared on her hospitable board; but she had flashing black eyes, and a certain stateliness of gait and grandeur of manner that impressed those young Bohemians, her boarders, with a kind of awe. They talked of her as the "countess," and by that name she was known to all inmates of the mansion; but in all their dealings with her they treated her with unfailing respect.

One of the quietest among the young men who enjoyed the privileges of Madame Magnotte's abode was a certain Gustave Lenoble, a law-student, the only son of a very excellent couple who lived on their own estate, near an obscure village in Normandy. The estate was of

the smallest: a dilapidated old house, known in the immediate neighbourhood as "the Château," and very dear to those who resided therein; a garden, in which everything seemed to have run to seed; and about forty acres of the poorest land in Normandy. These possessions constituted the patrimonial estate of François Lenoble, *propriétaire*, of Beaubocage, near Vevinord, in the Department of Eure.

The people, amongst whom the good man lived his simple life, called him M. Lenoble de Beaubocage, but he did not insist upon this distinction; and on sending out his only son to begin the battle of life in the great world of Paris, he recommended the young man to call himself Lenoble, *tout court*.

The young man had never cherished any other design. He was of all creatures the least presuming or pretentious. The father was Legitimist to the very marrow; the son half Buonapartist, half republican. The father and son had quarrelled about these differences of opinion sometimes in a pleasantly disputatious manner; but no political

disagreement could lessen the love between these two. Gustave loved his parents as only a Frenchman can venture to love his father and mother, —with a devotion for the gentleman that bordered on enthusiasm, with a fond reverence for the lady that was the very essence of chivalry. There was a sister, who regarded her brother Gustave as the embodiment of all that is perfect in youthful mankind; and there were a couple of old house-servants, a very stupid, clumsy lad in the stables, and half-a-dozen old mongrel dogs, born and bred on the premises, who seemed to share the young lady's opinions.

There was not a little discussion upon the subject of Gustave Lenoble's future career; and it was not without difficulty that the father could be persuaded to approve the choice of a profession which the young man had made. The seigneur of Beaubocage cherished an exaggerated pride of race little suspected by those who saw his simple life, and were pleased by his kindly, unaffected manners. The house of Lenoble, at some remote and almost mythical period of his-

tory, had distinguished itself in divers ways; and those bygone grandeurs, vague and shadowy in the minds of all others, seemed very real to Monsieur Lenoble. He assured his son that no Lenoble had ever been a lawyer. They had been always lords of the soil, living on their own lands, which had once stretched wide and far in that Norman province; a fact proved by certain maps in M. Lenoble's possession, the paper whereof was worn and yellow with age. They had stooped to no profession save that of arms. One seigneur of Beaubocage had fought under Bayard himself; another had fallen at Pavia, on that great day when all was lost *hormis l'honneur;* another had followed the white plume of the Bernais; another —but was there any need to tell of the glories of that house upon which Gustave was so eager to inflict the disgrace of a learned profession?

Thus argued the father; but the mother had spent her girlhood amidst the clamour of the Buonapartist campaigns, and the thought of war was very terrible to her. The memory of the retreat from Russia was not yet twenty years

old. There were men alive to tell the story, to depict those days and nights of horror, that mighty march of death. It was she and her daughter Cydalise who had helped to persuade Gustave that he was born to distinguish himself in the law. They wanted him to study in Paris, —the young man himself had a wild desire to enjoy the delights of that wondrous capital,— and to return in a few years to set up for himself as *avocat* at the town of Vevinord, some half-dozen leagues from the patrimonial estate. He was created to plead for the innocent, to denounce the guilty, to be grand and brave and fiery-hot with enthusiasm in defence of virtuous peasants charged unjustly with the stealing of sheep, or firing of corn-ricks. It never struck these simple souls that he might sometimes be called upon to defend the guilty, or to denounce the innocent.

It was all settled at last. Gustave was to go to Paris, and enter himself as a student of law. There were plenty of boarding-houses in the neighbourhood of the *Ecole de Droit*, where a young man might find a home; and to one of these Gus-

tave was recommended by a friend of his family. It was the Pension Magnotte to which they had sent him, the big dreary house, *entre cour et jardin*, which had once been so grand and noble. A printer now occupied the lower chambers, and a hand painted on the wall pointed to the *Pension Magnotte, au premier. Tirez le cordon, s.v.p.*

Gustave was twenty-one years of age when he came to Paris; tall, stalwart, broad of shoulders and deep of chest, with a fair frank face, an auburn moustache, candid, kind blue eyes—a physiognomy rather Saxon than Celtic. He was a man who made friends quickly, and was soon at home among the students, roaring their favourite songs, and dancing their favourite dances at the dancing-places of that day, joining with a pleasant heartiness in all their innocent dissipations. For guilty dissipation the young provincial had no taste. Did he not carry the images of two kind and pure women about with him, wherever he went, like two attendant angels ever protecting his steps; and could he leave them sorrowing on thresholds

they could not pass? Ah, no! He was loud and boisterous and wild of spirits in those early days, but incapable of meanness or vice.

"It is a brave heart," Madame Magnotte said of him, "though for the breaking of glasses a scourge—*un fléau*."

The ladies of the Pension Magnotte were for the most part of mature age and unattractive appearance—two or three lonely spinsters, eking out their pitiful little incomes as best they might, by the surreptitious sale of delicate embroideries, confectioned in their dismal leisure; and a fat elderly widow, popularly supposed to be enormously rich, but of miserly propensities. "It is the widow of Harpagon himself," Madame Magnotte told her gossips—an old woman with two furiously ugly daughters, who for the last fifteen years had lived a nomadic life in divers boarding-houses, fondly clinging to the hope that, amongst so many strange bachelors, husbands for these two solitary ones must at last be found.

These, with a pale young lady who gave music-lessons in the quarter, were all the feminine

inmates of the mansion; and amongst these Gustave Lenoble was chief favourite. His tender courtesy for these lonely women seemed in some manner an evidence of that good old blood whereof the young man's father boasted. Francis the First, who listened with bent knee and bare head to his mother's discourse, was not more reverential to that noble Savoyarde than was Gustave to the shabby-genteel maiden ladies of the Pension Magnotte. In truth, this young man had a heart pitiful and tender as the heart of woman. To be unfortunate was to possess a sure claim upon his pity and regard; to be poor and friendless was the best appeal to his kindness. He spent his evenings sometimes in the great dreary desert of a salon, and listened respectfully while Mademoiselle Servin, the young music-teacher, played dismal sonatas of Gluck or Grétry on a cracked old piano that had been one of the earliest made of those instruments, and was now attenuated and feeble as the very ghost of music. He listened to Madame Magnotte's stories of departed splendour. To him she opened her heart

as she never had opened it to those other young men.

"They mock themselves of everything—even the religion!" she exclaimed with horror. "They are Diderots and Holbachs in the bud, less the talent. But you do not come of that gutter in which they were born. You are of the old blood of France, M. Lenoble, and I can trust myself to you as I cannot to them. I, who speak to you, —I, too, come of a good old race, and there is sympathy between we others."

And then, after babbling to him of her lost station, the lady would entertain him with some dainty little supper with which she was wont to indulge herself and her lady boarders, when the students—who were treated something after the manner of schoolboys—were out of doors.

For four years the law-student had enjoyed his Parisian life,—not altogether idle, but not altogether industrious,—amusing himself a great deal, and learning very little; moderate in his expenditure, when compared with his fellow students, but no small drain upon the funds of the

little family at home. In sooth, this good old Norman family had in a pecuniary sense sunk very low. There was real poverty in the tumble-down house at Beaubocage, though it was poverty that wore a cheerful face, and took things pleasantly. A very humble English farmer would have despised the income which supported M. Lenoble's household; and it was only the economy and skill of the matron and her daughter which sustained the dignity of the small establishment.

There was one great hope cherished alike by the proud simple-minded old father, the fond mother, the devoted sister, and that was the hope in the grand things to be done, in the dim future, by Gustave, the son, the heir, the pole-star of the household.

Out of poverty, out of obscurity, into the broad light of honour and riches, was the house of Lenoble to be lifted by this young law-student. On the broad shoulders of this modern Atlas the Lenoble world was to be sustained. To him they looked, of him they thought, in the long dreary winter evenings during which the mother nodded

over her knitting, the father slept in his capacious easy-chair, the sister toiled at her needlework by her little table of *palissandre*.

He had paid them more than one visit during his two years of study, bringing with him life and light and gladness, as it seemed to the two women who adored him; and now, in the winter of 1828, they expected another visit. He was to be with them on the first day of the new year. He was to stay with them till his mother's fête—the seventeenth of January.

The father looked to this special visit with an unusual anxiety. The mother too was more than ever anxious. The sister, if she who loved her brother with a somewhat morbid intensity could be more anxious than usual, was more so now. A dreadful plot, a dire conspiracy, of which Gustave was to be the subject and victim, had been concocted beneath that innocent-seeming roof. Father, mother, and sister, seated round the family hearth, fatal as some domestic Parcæ, had hatched their horrid scheme, while the helpless lad amused himself yonder in the great city,

happily unconscious of the web that was being woven to enmesh him.

The cord which monsieur unwound, the mesh which madame held, the needle which dexterous mademoiselle wielded, were employed in the fabrication of a matrimonial net. These unsophisticated conspirators were bent upon bringing about the marriage of their victim, a marriage which should at once elevate and enrich the Lenobles of Beaubocage, in the person of Gustave.

François Lenoble's best friend and nearest neighbour was a certain Baron Frehlter, of Germanic origin, but for some generations past naturalised to the Gallic soil. The Baron was proprietor of an estate which could show ten acres for one of the lands of Beaubocage. The Baron boasted a family tree which derived its root from a ramification of the Hohenzollern pedigree; but, less proud and more prudent than the Lenobles, the Frehlters had not scorned to intermingle their Prussian blue blood with less pure streams of commercial France. The *épicier* element had prevailed in the fair brides of the house

of Frehlter for the last three or four generations, and the house of Frehlter had considerably enriched itself by this sacrifice of its family pride.

The present Baron had married a lady ten years his senior, the widow of a Rouen merchant, alike wealthy and pious, but famous rather for these attributes than for any personal charm. One only child, a girl, had blessed this union. She was now a young person of something under twenty years of age, newly emerged from her convent, and pining for some share in the gaieties and delights of a worldly paradise, which had already been opened to many of her schoolfellows.

Mademoiselle Frehlter's companions had, for the most part, left school to be married. She had heard of the *corbeille*, the wedding-dress, the wedding festivities, and occasionally a word or two about that secondary consideration, the bridegroom. The young lady was therefore somewhat inclined to take it ill of her father that he had not secured for her the *éclat* of an early marriage. Her departure from the convent of the Sacré Cœur, at Vevinord, was flat and tame to

an extreme degree. The future lay before her, a dreary desert of home-life, to be spent with a father who gorged himself daily at a greasy and savoury banquet, and who slept away the greater part of existence; and with a mother who divided her affections between a disagreeable poodle and a still more disagreeable priest—a priest who took upon himself to lecture the demoiselle Frehlter on the smallest provocation.

The château of the Frehlters was a very grand abode as compared to the tumbledown house of Beaubocage; but it was cold and stony to a depressing degree, and the furniture must have been shabby in the days of the Fronde. Faithful old servants kept the mansion in a state of spotless purity, and ruled the Baron and his wife with a rod of iron. Mademoiselle execrated these devoted retainers, and would have welcomed the sauciest of modern domestics who would have released her from the bondage of these servants of the old school.

Mademoiselle had been at home a year—a year of discontent and ill-humour. She had quarrelled

with her father, because he would not take her to Paris; with her mother, because she would not give her more new gowns and bonnets and feathers and furbelows; with the priest, with the poodle, with the autocracy below stairs, with everybody and everything. So at last the Baron decided that mademoiselle should marry, whereby he might be rid of her, and of her complaints, vagaries, ill-tempers, and general dissatisfaction.

Having once made up his mind as to the wisdom of a matrimonial arrangement, Baron Frehlter was not slow to fix upon a bridegroom. He was a very rich man, and Madelon was his only child, and he was furthermore a very lazy man; so, instead of looking far afield for a wealthy or distinguished suitor for his daughter, he was inclined to take the first that came to hand. It is possible that the Baron, who was of a somewhat cynical turn of mind, may have cherished no very exalted idea of his daughter's attractions, either personal or mental. However this might be, it is certain that when the demoiselle had ill-treated the poodle, and insulted the priest, and

quarrelled with the cook—that high-priestess of the kitchen who alone, in all Normandy, could concoct those messes which the Baron loved—the master of Côtenoir decided on marrying his heiress out of hand.

He communicated this design to his old crony, François Lenoble, one day when the Beaubocage family dined at Château Côtenoir.

"I think of marrying my daughter," he said to his friend, when the ladies were safely out of hearing at the other end of the long dreary salon. "Now, thy son Gustave is a fine fellow—brave, handsome, and of a good race. It is true he is not as rich as Madelon will be by and by; but I am no huckster, to sell my daughter to the best bidder"—("and I doubt if there would be many bidders for her, if I were so inclined," thought the Baron, in parenthesis),—"and if thy son should take a fancy to her, and she to him, it would please me well enough, friend François."

Friend François pricked up his ears, and in his old eyes flickered a feeble light. Côtenoir and Beaubocage united in the person of his son Gus-

tave! Lenoble of Beaubocage and Côtenoir—Lenoble of Côtenoir and Beaubocage! So splendid a vision had never shone before his eyes in all the dreams that he had dreamed about the only son, of whom he was so proud. He could not have shaped to himself so bold a project as the union of those two estates. And here was the Baron offering it to him, with his snuff-box, *en passant.*

"It would be a great marriage," he said, "a very great marriage. For Gustave I can answer without hesitation. He could not but be charmed by such a union—so amiable a bride would enchant him."

He looked down the room to the spot where Madelon and Cydalise were standing, side by side, admiring Madame Frehlter's poodle. Madelon could afford to be civil to the poodle before company. The contrast between the two girls was sufficiently striking. Cydalise was fair and bright-looking—Mademoiselle Frehlter was square and ungainly of figure, swarthy of complexion, dark of brow.

"He could not but be charmed," repeated the old man, with feeble gallantry.

He was thinking of the joining together of Beaubocage and Côtenoir; and it seemed a very small thing to him that such a union of estates would involve the joining of a man and woman, who were to hold to each other and love each other until death should part them.

"It shall be no marriage of convenience," said the Baron, in a generous spirit; "my daughter is somewhat ill-tem—that is to say, my daughter finds her life somewhat dull with her old father and mother, and I think she might be happier in the society of a husband. I like your son; and my wife, too, likes him better than any other young man of our acquaintance. Madelon has seen a good deal of him when she has been home from the convent in her holidays, and I have reason to think she does not dislike him. If he likes her and she likes him, and the idea is pleasing to you and madame, we will make a match of it. If not, let it pass; we will say no more."

Again the seigneur of Beaubocage assured his friend that Gustave would be enchanted with the proposal; and again it was of Côtenoir that he thought, and not of the heart or the inclinations of his son.

This conversation took place late in autumn, and at the new year Gustave was to come. Nothing was to be said to him about his intended wife until he arrived; that was a point upon which the Baron insisted.

"The young man may have fallen in love with some fine young person in Paris," he said; "and in that case we will say nothing to him of Madelon. But if we find him with the heart free, and inclined to take to my daughter, we may give him encouragement."

This was solemnly agreed between the two fathers. Nor was Mademoiselle Frehlter to be told of the matrimonial scheme until it ripened. But after this dinner at Côtenoir the household at Beaubocage talked of little else than of the union of the two families. What grandeur, what wealth, what happiness! Gustave the lord of Côtenoir!

Poor Cydalise had never seen a finer mansion than the old château, with its sugar-loaf towers and stone terraces, and winding stairs, and tiny inconvenient turret-chambers, and long dreary salon and *salle-à-manger*. She could picture to herself nothing more splendid. For Gustave to be offered the future possession of Côtenoir was as if he were suddenly to be offered the succession to a kingdom. She could not bring herself to consider that Madelon was neither agreeable nor attractive, and that, after all, the wife must count for something in every marriage-contract. She could see nothing, she could think of nothing but Côtenoir. The glory and grandeur of that estate absorbed every other consideration.

No one of those three conspirators feared any opposition on the part of their victim. It was just possible that Gustave might have fallen in love with some Parisian damsel, though his letters gave no hint of any such calamity. But if such a misfortune had happened, he would, of course, fall out of love again; return the damsel her troth and obtain the return of his own, and straightway

offer the second-hand commodity to Mademoiselle Frehlter.

The object of all these cares and hopes and dreams arrived at last, full of life and spirits, with plenty to tell about Paris in general, and very little to tell about himself in particular. The women questioned him unmercifully. They insisted on a graphic description of every female inmate of the boarding-house, and would scarcely believe that all except the little music-mistress were elderly and unattractive. Of the music-mistress herself they were inclined to be very suspicious, and were not altogether reassured by Gustave's assertion that she was neither pretty nor fascinating.

"She is a dear, good, industrious little thing," he said, "and works harder than I do. But she is no miracle of beauty; and her life is so dreary that I often wonder she does not go into a convent. It would be gayer and pleasanter for her than to live with those old women at the Pension Magnotte."

"I suppose there are many beautiful women

in Paris?" said Cydalise, bent upon knowing the worst.

"Well, I daresay there are," Gustave answered frankly; "but we students don't see much of them in our quarter. One sees a pretty little milliner's-girl now and then, or a washerwoman. In short, there are a good many grisettes in our part of the world," added the young man, blushing, but for no sin of his own. "We get a glimpse of a handsome woman sometimes, rattling past in her carriage; but in Paris handsome women do not go on foot. I have seen prettier girls at Vevinord than in Paris."

Cydalise was enchanted with this confession.

"Yes," she exclaimed, "our Normandy is the place for pretty girls. Madelon Frehlter, for example, is not she a very—amiable girl?"

"I daresay she's amiable enough," answered Gustave; "but if there were no prettier girls than Mademoiselle Frehlter in this part of the world, we should have no cause to boast. But there are prettier girls, Cydalise, and thou art thyself one of them."

After this speech the young man bestowed upon his sister a resounding kiss. Yes; it was clear that he was heart-whole. These noisy, boisterous good spirits were not characteristic of a lover. Even innocent Cydalise knew that to be in love was to be miserable.

From this time mother and sister tormented their victim with the merits and charms of his predestined bride. Madelon on the piano was miraculous; Madelon's little songs were enchanting; Madelon's worsted-work was a thing to worship; Madelon's devotion to her mother and her mother's poodle was unequalled; Madelon's respectful bearing to the good Abbé St. Velours,—her mother's director,—was positively beyond all praise. It was virtue seraphic, supernal. Such a girl was too good for earth—too good for anything except Gustave.

The young man heard and wondered.

"How you rave about Madelon Frehlter!" he exclaimed. "She seems to me the most commonplace young person I ever encountered. She has nothing to say for herself; she never appears to

know where to put her elbows. I never saw such elbows; they are everywhere at once. And her shoulders! O, heaven, then, her shoulders!—it ought to be forbidden to wear low dresses when one has such shoulders."

This was discouraging; but the schemers bore up even against this. The mother dwelt on the intellectual virtues of Madelon; and what were shoulders compared to mind, piety, amiability—all the Christian graces? Cydalise owned that dear Madelon was somewhat *gauche;* Gustave called her *bête.* The father remonstrated with his son. Was it not frightful to use a word of the barracks in connection with this charming young lady?

At last the plot revealed itself. After a dinner at Côtenoir and a dinner at Beaubocage, on both which occasions Gustave had made himself very agreeable to the ladies of the Baron's household, —since, indeed, it was not in his nature to be otherwise than kind and courteous to the weaker sex,—the mother told her son of the splendid destiny that had been shaped for him. It was a

matter of surprise and grief to her to find that the revelation gave Gustave no pleasure.

"Marriage was the last thing in my thoughts, dear mother," he said gravely; "and Madelon Frehlter is the very last woman I should think of for a wife. Nevertheless, I am gratified by the honour Monsieur le Baron has done me. That goes without saying."

"But the two estates!—together they would make you a great proprietor. You would not surely refuse such fortune?"

Cydalise gave a little scream of horror.

"Côtenoir! to refuse Côtenoir! Ah, surely that would be impossible! But figure to yourself, then, Gustave—"

"Nay, Cydalise, you forget the young lady goes with the château; a fixture that we cannot dispense with."

"But she, so amiable, so pious—"

"So plain, so stupid—"

"So modest, so charitable—"

"In short, so admirably adapted for a Sister of Charity," replied Gustave. "But no, dear

Cydalise. Côtenoir is a grand old place; but I would as soon spend my life at Toulon, dragging a cannon-ball at my heels, as in that dreary salon where Madame Frehlter nurses her maladies and her poodle, and where the good-humoured, easy-going old Baron snores away existence. 'Tis very well for those elderly folks, you see, my sister, and for Madelon,—for hers is an elderly mind in a youthful body; but for a young man full of hope and gaiety and activity—bah! It would be of all living deaths the worst. From the galleys there is always the hope of escaping—an underground passage, burrowed out with one's finger-nails in the dead of the night,—a work lasting twenty years or so, but with a feeble star of hope always glimmering at the end of the passage. But from the salon, and mamma, and the poodle, and the good, unctuous, lazy old director, and papa's apoplectic snoring, and the plaintive little songs and monotonous embroideries of one's wife, there would be no escape. Ah, bah!"

Gustave shuddered; and the two women shuddered as they heard him. The prospect was by no

means promising; but Madame Lenoble and her daughter did not utterly despair. Gustave's heart was disengaged. That was a great point; and for the rest, surely persuasion might do much.

Then came that phenomenon seen very often in this life—a generous-minded, right-thinking young man talked into a position which of all others is averse from his own inclinations. The mother persuaded, the sister pleaded, the father dwelt dismally upon the poverty of Beaubocage, the wealth of Côtenoir. It was the story of auld Robin Gray reversed. Gustave perceived that his refusal to avail himself of this splendid destiny would be a bitter and lasting grief to these people who loved him so fondly, whom he loved as fondly in return. Must he not be a churl to disappoint hopes so unselfish, to balk an ambition so innocent? And only because Madelon was not the most attractive or the prettiest of women!

The young man stood firm against all their arguments, he was unmoved by all their pleading. It was only when his anxious kindred had given up the battle for lost, that Gustave wavered.

Their mute despair moved him more than the most persuasive eloquence: and the end was submission. He left Beaubocage the plighted lover of that woman who, of all others, he would have been the last to choose for his wife. It had all been settled very pleasantly—the dowry, the union of the two estates, the two names. For six months Gustave was to enjoy his freedom, to finish his studies; and then he was to return to Normandy for his marriage.

"I have heard very good accounts of you from Paris," said the Baron. "You are not like some young men—wild, mad-brained. One can confide in your honour, your steadiness."

The good folks of Beaubocage were in ecstasies. They congratulated Gustave—they congratulated each other. A match so brilliant would be the redemption of the family. The young man at last began to fancy himself the favoured of the gods. What if Madelon seemed a little dull—a little wanting in that vivacity which is so pleasing to frivolous minds?—she was doubtless so much the more profound, so much the more virtuous.

If she was not bright and varied and beautiful as some limpid fountain dancing in summer sunlight, she was perhaps changeless and steady as a rock; and who would not rather have the security of a rock than the summer-day beauty of a fountain?

Before Gustave departed from his paternal home, he had persuaded himself that he was a very lucky fellow; and he had paid Mademoiselle Frehlter some pretty little stereotyped compliments, and had listened with sublime patience to her pretty little stereotyped songs. He left the young lady profoundly impressed by his merits; he left his own household supremely happy; and he carried away with him a heart in which Madelon Frehlter's image had no place.

CHAPTER II.

IN THIS WIDE WORLD I STAND ALONE.

Gustave went back to his old life, and was not much disturbed by the grandeur of his destiny as future seigneur of Côtenoir and Beaubocage. It sometimes occurred to him that he had a weight upon his mind; and, on consideration, he found that the weight was Madelon Frehlter. But he continued to carry the burden very lightly, and his easy-going student-life went on, unbroken by thoughts of the future. He sent polite messages to the demoiselle Frehlter, in his letters to Cydalise; and he received from Cydalise much information, more graphic than interesting, upon the subject of the family at Côtenoir: and so his days went on, with pleasant monotony. This was the brief summer of his youth; but, alas, how near at hand was the dark and dismal winter that

was to freeze this honest, joyous heart! That heart, so compassionate for all suffering, so especially tender for all womankind, was to be attacked upon its weaker side.

It was Gustave Lenoble's habit to cross the gardens of the Luxembourg every morning, on his way from the Rue Grande-Mademoiselle to the Ecole de Droit. Sometimes, when he was earlier than usual, he carried a book with him, and paced one of the more obscure alleys, reading, for an odd half-hour before he went to the daily mill-grinding in the big building beyond those quiet gardens.

Walking with his book one morning—it was a volume of Boileau, which the student knew by heart, and the pages whereof did not altogether absorb his attention—he passed and repassed a bench on which a lady sat, pensive and solitary, tracing shapeless figures on the ground with the point of her parasol. He glanced at her somewhat carelessly the first time of passing, more curiously on the second occasion, and the third time with considerable attention. Something in her

attitude—helplessness, hopelessness, nay indeed, despair itself, all expressed in the drooping head, the listless hand tracing those idle characters on the gravel—enlisted the sympathies of Gustave Lenoble. He had pitied her even before his gaze had penetrated the cavernous depths of the capacious bonnet of those days; but one glimpse of the pale plaintive face inspired him with compassion unspeakable. Never had he seen despair more painfully depicted on the human countenance—a despair that sought no sympathy, a sorrow that separated the sufferer from the outer world. Never had he seen a face so beautiful, even in despair. He could have fancied it the face of Andromache; when all that made her world had been reft from her; or of Antigone, when the dread fiat had gone forth—that funeral rites or sepulture for the last accursed scion of an accursed race there were to be none.

He put Boileau into his pocket. That glimpse of a suffering human mind, which had been unconsciously revealed to him, possessed an interest more absorbing than the grandest flight of poet

and satirical. As he passed for the fifth time, he looked at the mournful lady still more searchingly, and this time the sad eyes were lifted, and met his pitying looks. The beautiful lips moved, and murmured something in tones so tremulous as to be quite unintelligible.

The student took off his hat, and approached the lady, deferential as knight-errant of old awaiting the behest of his liege mistress.

"In what can I have the happiness to be agreeable to you, madame?"

"You are very good, monsieur," murmured the lady in very decent French, but with an accent unmistakably foreign—English, as Gustave opined. "I—I—am quite a stranger in Paris, and—and—I have heard there are numerous lodging-houses in this quarter—where one may obtain a lodging—cheaply. I have asked several nursemaids, and other women, in the gardens this morning; but they seem very stupid, and can tell me nothing; and I do not care to ask at the hotel where I am staying."

Gustave pondered. Yes, there were many

lodgings, he informed the lady. And then he thought of Madame Magnotte. Was it not his duty to secure this stray lodger for that worthy woman, if possible?

"If madame has no objection to a boarding-house—" he began.

Madame shook her head. "A boarding-house would suit me just as well," she said; "but it must not be expensive. I cannot afford to pay much."

"I know of a boarding-house very near this place, where madame might find a comfortable home on very reasonable terms. It is, in point of fact, the house in which I myself reside," added Gustave, with some timidity.

"If you will kindly direct me to the house—" said the lady, looking straight before her with sad unseeing eyes, and evidently supremely indifferent as to the residence or non-residence of M. Lenoble in the habitation referred to.

"Nay, madame, if you will permit me to conduct you there! It is but a walk of five minutes."

The stranger accepted the courtesy with a gentle indifference that was not ingratitude, but rather incapacity for any feeling except that one great sorrow which seemed to absorb her mind.

Gustave wondered what calamity could thus overwhelm one so young and beautiful.

The lady was quite silent during the little walk from the gardens to the Rue Grande-Mademoiselle, and Gustave observed her attentively as he walked by her side. She was evidently not more than four-and-twenty years of age, and she was certainly the prettiest woman he had ever seen. It was a fair, delicate, English beauty, a little worn and faded, as if by care, but idealised and sublimated in the process. At her brightest, this stranger must have been strikingly beautiful; in her sorrow she was touchingly lovely. It was what Gustave's countrymen call a *beauté navrante*.

Gustave watched her, and wondered about her. The dress she wore was sufficiently elegant, but had lost the gloss of newness. Her shawl, which she carried as gracefully as a Frenchwoman, was darned. Gustave perceived the neat careful

stitches, and divined the poverty of the wearer. That she should be poor was no subject for surprise; but that she, so sorrowful, so lonely, should seek a home in a strange city, was an enigma not easy to solve.

To Madame Magnotte, Gustave introduced the stranger. She gave just one look round the dreary saloon; but to Gustave's fancy that one look seemed eloquent.

"Ah me!" it said; "is this the fairest home I am to find upon this inhospitable earth?"

"She does not seem to belong to this world," the young man thought, as he went back to the garden where he had found his fair stranger, having been very coolly dismissed by Madame Magnotte after his introduction had been made.

And then M. Lenoble, being of a romantic turn of mind, remembered how a lady had been found by a student sitting on the lowest steps of the guillotine, desolate and helpless, at night; and how the student had taken her home and sheltered her, and had straightway fallen desperately in love with her, to discover, with unutterable

horror, that her head had been severed from her fair shoulders by the cruel knife twelve hours before, and that her melancholy loveliness was altogether phantasmal and delusive.

Was this English stranger whom Gustave had found in the gardens of the Luxembourg twin sister to that ghostly lady of the familiar legend? Her despair and her beauty seemed to him greater than earthly sorrow or earthly beauty; and he was half inclined to wonder whether she could be of the same race as Madelon Frehker. And from this hour the sense of a weight upon his mind, before so vague and intermittent, became an enduring oppression, not to be shaken off by any effort of his will.

All through that day he found himself thinking more of the unknown Englishwoman than was consistent with a strict performance of his duties. He was vexed with himself on account of this foolish distraction of mind.

"What a frivolous fellow I must be," he said to himself, "to dwell upon such a trifle! This comes of leading such a monotonous life."

At dinner he looked for the lady; but she did not appear at the long table, where the shrill old ladies, the epicurean old bachelors, the noisy students, daily devoured and grumbled at the four or five courses which old Nanon developed out of her inner consciousness and a rather scantily-furnished larder. He questioned Madame Magnotte after dinner, and was told that the lady was in the house, but was too tired to dine with the other inmates.

"I have to thank thee for a new boarder, my friend," she said. "Madame Meynell will not pay largely; but she seems a quiet and respectable person, and we shall doubtless be well pleased with each other."

"Madame Meynell?" repeated Gustave, congratulating himself on finding that the Englishwoman was an inhabitant of the house he lived in. "She is a widow, I suppose?"

"Yes, she is a widow. I asked that question, and she answered, yes. But she told me nothing of her late husband. She is not at all communicative."

This was all Gustave could obtain from Madame Magnotte. She was not communicative. No; she was, indeed, scarcely less silent than that ghostly lady who had been found sitting at the foot of the guillotine. There was some kind of mystery involved in her sorrowful face, her silent apathy. It was possibly the fact of this mystery which interested M. Lenoble. Certain it is that the young man's interest had been aroused by this unknown Englishwoman, and that his mind was more occupied by the image of her whom he had seen but once than by that of his plighted wife.

He waited anxiously for the next day; but on the next day Madame Meynell still pleaded fatigue and illness. It was only on the third day that she appeared at the noisy banquet, pale, silent, absent-minded, sheltering herself under the wing of Madame Magnotte, who was disposed to be kind to this helpless stranger. To Gustave the young English widow seemed like a ghost at that crowded board. He looked at her every now and then from his distant seat, and saw her always with

the same hopeless far-away look in her sad eyes. He himself was silent and *distrait*.

"Of what dost thou dream, my droll one?" said his nearest neighbour. "Thou art positively insupportable."

M. Lenoble could not become vivacious or entertaining at the behest of his fellow-student. The consciousness of that strange pale face haunted and oppressed him. He hoped to have a few minutes' talk with the English lady after dinner, but she disappeared before the removal of those recondite preparations which in the Pension Magnotte went by the generic name of "dessert."

For more than a week she appeared thus at the dinner-table, eating very little, speaking not at all, except such monosyllabic replies as the hostess now and then extorted from her pale lips. A creature at once so beautiful and so profoundly sad became an object of interest to others besides Gustave; but in no breast was the sympathy which her sadness and beauty excited so poignant as in his. Her face haunted him. The familiar pleasures and amusements became dis-

tasteful to him. He spent his evenings at home in the dismal salon, and was content to listen to the chatter of the old women, the lady music-mistress's dreary sonatas, the monotonous roll of wheels on the distant quay; anything rather than the hackneyed round of student-life that had once been agreeable to him. He did not fail to write his weekly letter to Cydalise; but for some reason or other, he refrained from any allusion to the English stranger, although it was his custom to relate all his adventures for the amusement of the family at Beaubocage.

An evening came at last on which Madame Meynell was persuaded to remain with the other ladies after dinner.

"It must be very cold and cheerless for you in your bedroom," said Madame Magnier; "why not spend your evening with us, in a pleasant and social manner?"

"You are very good, madame," murmured the Englishwoman, in the slow timid accents that had so plaintive a sound to Gustave's ear; "if you wish it, I will stay."

She seemed to submit rather from utter weakness and inability to refuse anything asked of her than from any hope of finding pleasure in the society of the Magnotte salon.

It was an evening in March—cold, blustrous, dreary. The east wind blew clouds of dust athwart the Rue Grande-Mademoiselle, and the few foot-passengers in that dull thoroughfare looked pinched and wretched. The old ladies gathered round the great black stove, and gossipped in the twilight; the music-mistress went to her feeble piano, and played, unasked, unheeded; for Gustave, who was wont to turn the leaves, or sit attentive by the piano, seemed this evening unconscious of the music. Madame Meynell sat in one of the windows, alone, half-hidden by the faded yellow damask curtains, looking out into the street.

Something—some impulse which he tried to resist, but could not—drew Gustave towards that lonely figure by the window. He went close up to the strange lady. This evening, as in the gardens of the Luxembourg, she seemed to him a living statue of despair. Now, as then, he felt

an interest in her sorrow which he was powerless to combat. He had a vague idea that even this compassionate sympathy was in some manner an offence against Madelon Frehlter, the woman to whom he belonged, and yet he yielded to the fatal weakness.

"Yes, I belong to her," he said to himself; "I belong to Madelon Frehlter. She is neither pretty nor fascinating; but I have every reason to believe her very good, very amiable; and she is the only woman, except those of my own kindred, in whom I have any right to be interested."

He did not say this in so many words; but this was the shape which his thoughts assumed as he yielded to the tempter, and walked straight to the distant window by which Madame Meynell had seated herself.

She started slightly as he approached her, and then looked up and recognised him as her acquaintance of the Luxembourg.

"Good-evening, monsieur," she said; "I have to thank you for having helped me to find a comfortable home."

Having said this in a low gentle voice, she looked out into the street once more with her mournful unseeing eyes. It was evident that she had no more to say to M. Lenoble.

The student, however, had no idea of leaving the window just yet, although he knew — yes, knew—that his presence there was a wrong done to Madelon Frehlter; but a wrong so small, so infinitesimal, that it was really not worth consideration.

"I am enchanted to think that I was of some slight service to you, madame," he said; "but I fear you will find this quarter of Paris very dull."

She did not take any notice of this remark until Gustave had repeated it, and then she spoke as if suddenly awakened from a trance.

"Dull?" she said. "No, I have not found it dull. I do not care for gaiety."

After this, M. Lenoble felt that he could say no more. The lady relapsed into her waking trance. The dust-clouds in the silent street seemed more interesting to her than M. Lenoble of Beauboeage. He lingered a few minutes in

the neighbourhood of her chair, thoughtfully observant of the delicate profile, the pale clear tints of a complexion that had lost its bloom but not its purity; the settled sadness of the perfect mouth; the dreamy pensiveness of the dark-gray eye; and then was fain to retire.

After this, the English widow lady spent many evenings in Madame Magnotte's salon. The old Frenchwoman gossipped and wondered about her; but the most speculative could fashion no story from a page so blank as this joyless existence. Even slander could scarcely assail a creature so unobtrusive as the English boarder. The elderly ladies shrugged their shoulders and pursed-up their lips with solemn significance. There must needs be something—a secret, a mystery, sorrow, or wrong-doing—somewhere; but of Madame Meynell herself no one could suspect any harm.

Gustave Lenoble heard little of this gossip about the stranger; but she filled his thoughts nevertheless. The vision of her face came between him and his work; and when he thought of the future, and of the damsel who had been

allotted to him for a wife, his thoughts were very bitter.

"Fate is like Laban," he said to himself; "a man works and does his duty for seven years, and then Fate gives him Leah instead of Rachel. No doubt Leah is a very good young woman; one has no complaint to make against her, except that she is not Rachel."

This was not a hopeful manner of looking at things for the destined master of Côtenoir. M. Lenoble's letters to the anxious folks at Beaubocage became, about this time, somewhat brief and unsatisfactory. He no longer gave ample details of his student-life—he no longer wrote in his accustomed good spirits. His letters seemed stiff and constrained.

"I am afraid he is studying too much," said the mother.

"I daresay the rascal is wasting his time in dissipation," suggested the father.

CHAPTER III.

"PAST HOPE, AND IN DESPAIR."

Two months had elapsed since the bleak spring morning on which Gustave found the solitary lady under the leafless trees of the Luxembourg gardens. The inmates of the Pension Magnotte had grown accustomed to her presence, to her silence, her settled sadness, and troubled themselves no further respecting herself or her antecedents. The lapse of time had brought no improvement to her spirits; indeed, Gustave, who watched her closely, perceived that she had grown paler and thinner since that March morning when he met her in the public garden. Her life must have been painfully monotonous. She very rarely went out of doors, and on no occasion ventured beyond the gardens of the Luxembourg. No one visited her. She neither wrote nor received any letters. She was wont to make a pretence of

reading as she sat in her retired corner of the salon; but Gustave had discovered that she gave little attention to her book. The open volume in her hand seemed no more than an excuse for brooding upon her sorrows.

If people, prompted by curiosity or by compassion, endeavoured to get into conversation with this lonely lady, the result was always the same. She would answer their questions in a low gentle voice, with a quiet politeness; but she never assisted them in the smallest degree to interchange thoughts with her. It seemed as if she sought neither friend nor sympathiser, or as if her case were so entirely hopeless as to admit of neither. She paid for her board and lodging weekly with a punctilious exactness, though weekly payments were not the rule of the house.

"My movements are uncertain," she said to Madame Magnotte. "I cannot tell how long I may be with you. It will therefore be better for me to pay you weekly."

She had been in the house two months, dining every day at the public table, spending all her

evenings in the public saloon; and during that time her settled gloom had never been broken by any outburst of grief or passion. She might have been a creature of ice, a statue of despair modelled in snow by a Michael Angelo. But one night the ice melted, the statue of snow became in a moment a passionate, grief-stricken woman.

It was one bright evening late in May. Ah, how near at hand was the appointed date of those nuptials to which the household of Beaubocage looked forward with supreme happiness! The old ladies of the Pension Magnotte were for the most part out of doors. The long saloon was almost empty. There were only Gustave, Madame Magnotte, and the little music-mistress, who sat at her piano, with the western sunlight shining full upon her, rosy-hued and glorious, surrounding her with its soft radiance until she looked like a humble St. Cecilia.

Madame Meynell had seated herself close to the piano, and was listening to the music. Gustave hovered near, pretending to be occupied with a limp little sheet of news published that evening.

Mademoiselle Servin, the teacher of music, upon this occasion deserted her favourite masters. She seemed in a somewhat dreamy and sentimental humour, and played tender little melodies, and simple plaintive airs, that were more agreeable to Gustave than those grand examples of the mathematics of counterpoint which she so loved to interpret.

"You like this melody of Grétry's," said the music-mistress, as M. Lenoble seated himself close to the piano. "I do not think you care for classic sonatas—the great works of Gluck, or Bach, or Beethoven?"

"No," replied the young man frankly; "I do not care about anything I can't understand. I like music that goes to one's heart."

"And you too, Madame Meynell, like simple melodies?" mademoiselle asked of that lady, who was not wont to come so near the little piano, or to pay so much attention to Mademoiselle Servin's performance.

"O yes," murmured the Englishwoman, "I like such music as that."

"And you, too, think that Beethoven never composed simple plaintive airs—for example," exclaimed the pianist, playing softly while she spoke. "You think he wrote only sonatas, quartettes, fugues, grand operas, like *Fidelio*. Have you never heard this, by your scientific Beethoven?"

Hereupon she played "Hope told a flattering tale," with much tenderness and delicacy. Her two hearers listened, mute, and deeply moved. And then from that familiar melody she glided softly into another, most musical, most melancholy, which has been set to some of the sweetest verses that Thomas Moore ever composed:

> "Those evening bells, those evening bells!
> How many a tale their music tells
> Of youth and home, and that sweet time
> When last I heard their soothing chime!"

All the world sung the verses of Ireland's divine bard in those days. The song was one which the Englishwoman had sung years ago in a happy home. What recollections, what associations were evoked by that plaintive melody, who shall say?

The words came back with the music to which they have been eternally wedded. The words, their mournful meaning, the faces of the friends amongst whom she had last sung them, the picture of the peaceful home whose walls had echoed the music,—all these things arose before her in a vision too painfully vivid; and the lonely boarder at the Pension Magnotte covered her face with her hands, and sobbed aloud.

The passion of tears lasted but a minute. Madame Meynell dried her eyes, and rose to leave the room.

"Do not question me," she said, perceiving that her two companions were about to offer her their sympathy. "I cannot tell you the memories that were conjured up by that music. It brought back a home I shall never see again, and the faces of the dead,—worse than dead to me,—and the happiness I have lost, and the hopes and dreams that once were mine. O, I pray God I may never hear that melody again!"

There was a passion, a depth of feeling, in her tone quite new to Gustave Lenoble. He opened

the door for her without a word, and she passed out of the salon quickly, like a ghost—the ghost of that bright young creature who had once borne her shape, and been called by her name, in a pleasant farmhouse among the Yorkshire wolds.

"Ah, but how that poor soul must have suffered!" cried the sympathetic Mademoiselle Servin, as the door closed on the Englishwoman. "I did not think it was in her to feel so deeply. I thought she was stone, and now I begin to think it must be of such stone as Niobe—the petrifaction of despair."

Upon Gustave Lenoble this scene made a profound impression. He lay awake during the greater part of that night, thinking of the lonely lady's tears and anguish. The music of "Those evening bells" pervaded his dreams. He rose unrefreshed, feverish, forgetful of Côtenoir and Madelon Fribler, as if that place and that person had never emerged from the shapeless substances of chaos. He wanted to see her again, to console her, if that were possible. O, that it might be his privilege to console her! He pitied her with

a compassion so intense, that thus to compassionate her woes was himself to suffer a poignant anguish. He pitied her. Yes, he told himself again and again that this sentiment which so absorbed his heart and mind was no more than pity. But O, if this were pity, what were love? *That* was a question which also presented itself to the mind of M. Gustave Lenoble, of Beaubocage *in esse*, and Côtenoir *in posse*.

Madame Meynell rarely appeared at the common breakfast in the grim dining-room of the Pension Magnotte. Gustave was therefore in nowise surprised to miss her on this particular morning. He took a cup of coffee, and hurried off to his daily duties. There was a fever on him which he could neither understand nor shake off, and he hastened to the gardens of the Luxembourg, as if there were some special necessity for speed. So do men often hasten unconsciously to their predestined doom, defiant of augury. Soothsayers may menace, and wives may dream dreams; but when his hour comes, Cæsar will go to the appointed spot where the daggers of his assassins await him.

In the alley where he had first looked upon her sad face, beneath the umbrage of young limes and chestnuts just bursting into bloom, he saw the Englishwoman to-day, seated on the same bench, almost in the same attitude.

He went up to her, and bade her good-morning; and then, intensely conscious of his own temerity, seated himself by her side.

"I did not expect to find you here so early."

"No, I seldom come out so soon; but this morning I have to make some inquiries upon a matter of business, and I am only resting here before going to make them."

She gave a little weary sigh at the end of this speech. It seemed a strange manner of transacting business to rest in the Luxembourg gardens, which were distant but a few hundred yards from her home. Gustave divined that it was for very forlornness she lingered there, shrinking from some difficult encounter that lay before her.

"Can I not make the inquiries for you?" he asked. "Pray command me. It will be my happiness to be useful to you."

"You are very good. I cannot trouble you so much."

"Pray do not talk of trouble. It can be no trouble to me to aid you in any manner. Ah, madame, you do not know how much I would sacrifice to be useful to you!"

She must have been dull indeed had she failed to perceive the earnestness of his tone. She did perceive it, and was vaguely conscious that in this student of law she had a friend.

"I want to know when the diligence for Calais leaves Paris, and from what office," she said. "I am going back to England."

She was surprised to see the young man's face blanch as she announced this simple fact. The young man himself was surprised by the sudden anguish inflicted by her announcement. It was in this moment that he first discovered how completely he had given his heart into this strange woman's keeping.

"You are really going to leave Paris?—for ever?" he exclaimed.

"Yes. I have been here too long already. I

have no business here. I ought to have gone back to England that day when I first met you here, but I put off the day of my return. I can put it off no longer."

"And you are going back to your friends?" Gustave asked, in a very mournful tone.

"I am going back to my friends? Yes!" Her lips quivered a little, and the unbidden tears came to her eyes.

Ah, what was the sorrow that oppressed this beauteous lonely creature? What agony of grief or self-reproach was this pain which consumed her? Gustave remembered her passion of tears on the previous night; her talk of friends that were dead, and happiness lost; and now to-day she talked of going home to her friends; but O the bitterness of expression with which she had spoken that word "friends"!

"Are you going alone, Madame Meynell?" he inquired, after a pause. He could not tear himself from that seat by her side. He could not be manly or rational where she was concerned. The image of Madelon Frehlter rose before his mental

vision, reproachful, menacing; but a thick fog intervened to obscure that unwelcome image. His whole life resolved itself into those thrilling moments in which he sat here, on this common garden-bench, by this stranger's side; the entire universe was contracted into this leafy walk where they two sat.

"Yes, I am going alone," madame replied, with a little laugh. "Who should I have to go with me? I am quite alone in the world. I think I had better make these inquiries myself, M. Lenoble. There is no reason why I should give you so much trouble."

"There is no such thing as trouble. I will bring you all necessary information to-day at dinner, if that will be soon enough."

"Quite soon enough, I thank you, monsieur," she answered with a sigh. "I must ask you kindly to ascertain for me also the expense of the journey."

"Most certainly, madame."

This request set him wondering whether she were poor, and how poor. But she had evidently

no more to say to him; she had again become impenetrable. He would fain have stayed, though honour and conscience were clamorous in their demands for his departure. Happily for honour and conscience the lady was silent as death, impervious as marble; so M. Lenoble presently bowed and departed.

He thought of her all day long. The farce of pity was ended. He knew now that he loved this Englishwoman with an affection at once foolish and sinful: foolish, since he knew not who or what this woman was; sinful, since the indulgence of this passion involved the forfeiture of his plighted word, the disappointment of those who loved him.

"No, no, no," he said to himself, "I cannot do this base and wicked thing. I must marry Madelon. All the hopes of my mother and father rest on that marriage; and to disappoint them because this stranger's face has bewitched me? Ah, no, it cannot be. And even if I were willing to trample my honour in the dust, how do I know that she would value or accept the sacrifice?"

M. Lenoble made all necessary inquiries at the office of the Messageries, and carried the intelligence to Madame Meynell. He could see that she winced a little when he told her the cost of the journey, which in those days was heavy.

"She must certainly be poor," he said to himself; and it rent his heart to think that even in this paltry matter he could be of no use to her. The destined master of Beaubocage and Côtenoir was entirely without ready-money. He had his watch. He put his hand upon that clumsy time-keeper as he talked to madame.

"*Je te porterai chez ma tante, mon gars,*" he said to himself. But he doubted whether the high-priests of the pious mountain—the Dordona of Pauperism—would advance much upon this antique specimen of the watchmaker's art.

After this evening he looked forward daily, hourly, to the anguish of her departure. She would vanish out of his life, intangible as a melted snow-flake, and only memory would stay behind to tell him he had known and loved her. Why should this be so hard to bear? If she

stayed, he dared not tell her she was dear to him, he dared not stretch forth his hand to help her. In all the world there was no creature more utterly apart from him than she, whether she lived in the same house with him or was distant as the Antipodes. What did it matter, then, since she was destined to disappear from his life, whether she vanished to-day or a year hence? He argued with himself that it could be a question of no moment to him. There was a death-blow that must descend upon him, cruel, inevitable. Let it come when it would.

Every day when he came home to dinner, M. Lenoble expected to behold a vacant place by the side of his hostess; every day he was pleasantly disappointed. The pale hopeless face was still to be seen, ghostlike, at that noisy board. The face was more pale, more hopeless, as it seemed to Gustave, every day he looked upon it.

He asked Madame Magnotte when the English lady was going to leave, but she could not tell.

"She talks of leaving from day to day," said madame; "it will no doubt be soon. I am sorry

to lose her. She is very gentle, and gives no trouble to anyone. But she is sad; ah, how sad she is! She has suffered, monsieur."

Gustave agreed to this. Yes, she had suffered; but what, and how?

He watched her closely, but she was always the same. She no longer spent her evenings in the salon, but in her own apartment. He saw her only at dinner-time, and had no opportunity of speaking to her.

At last the day came upon which he missed her at the usual hour. He sat through the tedious meal without speaking; eating a little, drinking a little, mechanically, but with no consciousness of what he ate or drank. There was a mist before his eyes, a confusion of voices in his ears; but the faculties of sight and hearing seemed suspended. The agony he suffered during that miserable hour was bitter as death.

"O, my God, how I love her!" he said to himself, while Raoul's bass roar brayed in his ear on one side, and Leon's shrill squeal tortured him on the other.

He made his way to Madame Magnotte directly after dinner.

"She is gone?" he exclaimed.

"But who, my friend? Ah, yes; it is of that poor Madame Meynell you speak. How you are interested in her! No, she is not gone, poor woman. She remains always. She has the air of a person who knows not her own mind. Yet I am sure she thinks of going. To-day, for the first time, she has been writing letters. Reine came to tell me she had seen her occupied in her own room for the first time. It is not her habit to occupy herself."

Gustave's heart gave a great jump. She was not gone; he might see her again—if it were but a glimpse of her pale face looking out of the diligence as it drove out of the Cour de Messageries. One look, one glance; it would be something to carry in his heart all his life. All his life! He looked forward and shuddered. What a dreary life it must needs be! Côtenoir, Beaubocage, Madelon, the law; to plead, to read papers, to study dryasdust books. He shrank appalled from the

contemplation of that dreary desert of existence—a life without her.

She had been writing letters—doubtless letters to her friends to announce her return. Her departure must be very near at hand.

Gustave refused to go out that evening. His fellow-students were bent on a night's pleasure at a dancing-garden then in vogue, where there would be twinkling lamps and merry music under the May moon. The lamplit parterres, the joyous waltzes, had no attractions for Gustave Lenoble. He haunted the dull salon, dim and dreary in the twilight; for Madame Magnotte was chary of lamps and candles, and prolonged to its utmost limits the pensive interval between day and night. He walked softly up and down the room, unheeded by the ladies clustered in a group by one of the windows. Restless and unhappy, he could neither go nor stay. She was not coming down to the salon this evening. He had clung to the faint hope that she might appear; but the faint hope died away in his breast as the night deepened. What purpose could be served by his re-

maining in that dismal room? He was no nearer *her* than he would have been in the remotest wilds of Central America. He would go out—not to the odious dancing-garden, but to the cool dark streets, where the night-wind might blow this fever from his brain.

He left the room suddenly, and hurried downstairs. At the bottom of the staircase he almost stumbled against a woman, who turned and looked at him in the light of a little oil-lamp that hung over the door of the portress's lodge.

It was the Englishwoman, deadly pale, and with a wild look in her face that Gustave had never seen there before. She gave him no sign of recognition, but passed out of the court-yard, and walked rapidly away. That unusual look in her face, the strangeness of the fact that she should be leaving the house at this hour, inspired him with a vague terror, and he followed her, not stealthily, without a thought that he was doing any wrong by such an act—rather, indeed, with the conviction that he had a right so to follow her.

She walked very quickly—at a more rapid

pace than Gustave would have supposed possible for so fragile a creature. She chose the lonelier streets, and Gustave had no difficulty in following her; she never looked back, but went straight on her course, without pause or slackening of her pace, as if with a settled purpose.

"Where can she be going?" Gustave asked himself; and an answer, vague, hideous, terrible, suggested itself to his mind. The idea that occurred to him was one that would scarcely have occurred to an Englishman under the same circumstances, but to a Frenchman it was a very familiar idea.

It was dark now—the darkness that reigns between early sunset and late moonrise. As the lonely woman went farther along the dreary streets parallel with the quay, the dreadful suspicion grew stronger in Gustave's mind. From that instant he had but one thought; in that moment he put away from him for ever all sense of obligation to Madelon Frehlter; he shook off father, mother, sister, old associations, home-ties, ambition, fortune,—he lived alone for this woman, and the

purpose of his life was to save her from despair and death.

They emerged upon the quay at last. The long stretch of pavement was deserted. Ah, now she looked back—she looked on every side with wild, unseeing eyes—and now there could be little doubt as to the purpose that brought her here. She crossed the road, and went upon the bridge, Gustave following close; in the next minute she was standing on the stone bench, a tremulous, fluttering figure, with arms stretched towards the water—in a breath she was clasped to Gustave's breast, clasped by arms that meant to hold her for ever.

The shock of that surprise utterly unnerved the wretched creature. She shivered violently, and struggled to free herself from those strong arms.

"Let me go!" she cried in English. "Let me go!" And then, finding herself powerless, she turned and looked at her captor. "M. Lenoble! O, why do you persecute me? Why do you follow me?"

"Because I want to save you."

"To save me! To snatch me back when I was going to find rest—an end for my weary life! O yes, I know that it is a sinful end; but my life has been all sin."

"Your life all sin! Foolish one, I will never believe that."

"It is true," she cried, with passionate self-reproach. "The sin of selfishness, and pride, and disobedience. There is no fate too hard for me—but, O, my fate is very hard! Why did you keep me from that river? You do not know how miserable my life is—you do not know. I paid my last penny to Madame Magnotte this morning. I have no money to take me back to England, even if I dared go there—and I dare not. I have prayed for courage, for strength to go back, but my prayers have not been heard; and there is nothing for me but to die. What would be the sin of my throwing myself into that river? I must die; I shall die of starvation in the streets."

"No, no," cried Gustave passionately; "do you think I have dragged you back from death to

give you to loneliness and despair? My dear one, you are mine—mine by right of this night. These arms that have kept you from death shall shelter you;—ah, let them shelter you! These hands shall work for you. My love, my love! you cannot tell how dear you are to me. If there must be want or trouble for either of us, it shall come to me first."

He had placed her on the stone bench, bewildered and unresisting, and had seated himself by her side. The fragile figure, shivering still, even in the mild atmosphere of the spring night, was sustained by his encircling arm. He felt that she was his, irrevocably and entirely—given to him by the Providence which would have seemed to have abandoned her, but for the love it had implanted for her in this one faithful heart. His tone had all the pleading tenderness of a lover's; but it had something more—an authority, a sense of possession.

"Providence sent me here to save you," he said, with that gentle yet authoritative tone,—"I am your providence, am I not, dearest? Fate

made me love you—fondly, hopelessly, as I thought. Yesterday you seemed as far away from me as those pale stars, shining up yonder—as incomprehensible as that faint silvery mist above the rising moon—and to-night you are my own."

He knew not what ties might be broken by this act. He had indeed a vague consciousness that the step which he was now taking would cause a lifelong breach between himself and his father. But the time had gone by in which he could count the cost.

"Let me go back, M. Lenoble," the Englishwoman said presently. The faintness of terror was passing away, and she spoke almost calmly. "Let me go back to the house. It is you that have saved me from a dreadful sin. I promise you that I will not again think of committing that deadly sin. I will wait for the end to come. Let me go, my kind friend. Ah, no, no; do not detain me! Forget that you have ever known me."

"That is not in my power. I will take you

back to the Pension Magnotte directly; but you must first promise to be my wife."

"Your wife! O, no, no, no! That is impossible."

"Because you do not love me," said Gustave, with mournful gravity.

"Because I am not worthy of you."

Humiliation and self-reproach unspeakable were conveyed in those few words.

"You are worth all the stars to me. If I had them in my hands, those lamps shining up there, I would throw them away, to hold you," said the student passionately. "You cannot understand my love, perhaps. I seem a stranger to you, and all I say sounds wild and foolish. My love, it is true as the heaven above us—true as life or death—death that was so near you just now. I have loved you ever since that bleak March morning on which I saw you sitting under the leafless trees yonder. You held me from that moment. I was subjugated—possessed—yours at once and for ever. I would not confess even to myself that my heart had resigned itself to you; but I know

now that it was so from the first. Is there any hope that you will ever pay me back one tithe of my love?"

"You love me," the Englishwoman repeated slowly, as if the words were almost beyond her comprehension,—"you love *me*, a creature so lost, so friendless! Ah, but you do not know my wretched story!"

"I do not ask to know it. I only ask one question—will you be my wife?"

"You must be mad to offer your name, your honour to me."

"Yes, I am mad—madly in love. And I am waiting for your answer. You will be my wife? My angel, you will say yes! It is not much that I offer you—a life of uncertainty, perhaps even of poverty; but a fond and constant heart, and a head and hands that will work for you while God gives them strength. It is better than the river."

All that was thoughtless and hopeful in his disposition was expressed in these words. The woman to whom he pleaded was weakened by

sorrow, and the devotion of this brave true heart brought her strength, comfort, almost hope.

"Will you be my friend?" she said gently. "Your words seem to bring me back to life. I wanted to die because I was so wretched, so lonely. I have friends in England—friends who were once all that is dear and kind; but I dare not go to them. I think a cruel look from one of those friends would kill me with a pain more bitter than any other death could give. And I have no right to hope for kind looks from them. Yours are the only words of friendship I have heard for a long time."

"And you will give me the right to work for you—to protect you? You will be my wife?"

"I would rather be your servant," she answered, with sad humility. "What right have I to accept so great a sacrifice? What folly can be so foolish as your love for me—if it is indeed love, and not a wild fancy of to-night!"

"It is a fancy that will last my life."

"Ah, you do not know how such fancies change."

"I know nothing except that mine is changeless. Come, my love, it is growing late and cold. Let me take you home. The portress will wonder. You must slip past her quietly with your veil down. Did you give old Margot your key when you came downstairs to-night?"

"No, it is in my pocket. I was not thinking—I—"

She stopped with a sudden shudder. Gustave understood that shudder; he also shuddered. She had left her room that night possessed by the suicide's madness; she had left it to come straight to death. Happily, his strong arm had come between her and that cruel grave by which they were still lingering.

They walked slowly back to the Rue Grande-Mademoiselle under the light of the newly-risen moon. The Englishwoman's wasted hand rested for the first time on M. Lenoble's arm. She was his—his by the intervention and by the decree of Providence! That became a conviction in the young man's mind. He covered her late return to the house with diplomatic art, engag-

ing the portress in conversation while the dark figure glided past in the dim lamplight. On the staircase he paused to bid her good-night.

"You will walk with me in the Luxembourg Garden to-morrow morning, dearest," he said. "I have so much to say—so much. Until then, adieu!"

He kissed her hand, and left her on the threshold of her apartment, and then went to his own humble bachelor's chamber, singing a little drinking-song in his deep manly voice, happy beyond all measure.

They walked together next day in the gardens of the Luxembourg. The poor lonely creature whom Gustave had rescued seemed already to look up to him as a friend and protector, if not in the character of a future husband. It was no longer this fair stranger who held possession of Gustave. It was Gustave who had taken possession of her. The stronger nature had subjugated the weaker. So friendless, so utterly destitute—penniless, helpless, in a strange land, it is little matter for wonder that Susan

Meynell accepted the love that was at once a refuge and a shelter.

"Let me tell you my wretched story," she pleaded, as she walked under the chestnut-trees by her lover's side. "Let me tell you everything. And if, when you have heard what an unhappy creature I am, you still wish to give me your heart, your name, I will be obedient to your wish. I will not speak to you of gratitude. If you could understand how debased an outcast I seemed to myself last night when I went to the river, you would know how I must feel your goodness. But you can never understand—you can never know what you seem to me."

And then in a low voice, and with infinite shame and hesitation, she told him her story.

"My father was a tradesman in the city of London," she said. "We were very well off, and my home ought to have been a happy one. Ah, how happy such a home would seem to me now! But I was idle and frivolous and discontented in those days, and was dissatisfied with

our life in the city because it seemed dull and monotonous to me. When I look back now, and remember how poor a return I gave for the love that was given to me—my mother's anxiety, my father's steady, unpretending kindness—I feel how well I have deserved the sorrows that have come to me since then."

She paused here, but Gustave did not interrupt her. His interest was too profound for any conventional expression. He was listening to the story of his future wife's youth. That there could be any passage in that history which would hinder him from claiming this woman as his wife, was a possibility he did not for a moment contemplate. If there were shame involved in the story, as Madame Meynell's manner led him to suppose there must be, so much the worse was it for him, since the shame must be his, as she was his.

"When my father and mother died, I went into Yorkshire to live with my married sister. I cannot find words to tell you how kind they were to me—my sister and her husband. I had a little

money left me by my father, and I spent the greater part of it on fine dress, and on foolish presents to my sister and her children. I was happier in Yorkshire than I had been in London; for I saw more people, and my life seemed gayer and brighter than in the city. One day I saw a gentleman, the brother of a nobleman who lived in the neighbourhood of my sister's house. We met by accident in a field on my brother-in-law's farm, where the gentleman was shooting; and after that he came to the house. He had seen my sister before, and made some excuse for renewing his acquaintance. He came very often, and before long he asked me to marry him; and I promised to be his wife, with my sister's knowledge and consent. She loved me so dearly, and was so proud of me, out of her dear love, that she saw nothing wonderful in this engagement, especially as Mr. Kingdon, the gentleman I am speaking of, was a younger son, and by no means a rich man."

Again she stopped, and waited a little before continuing her story. Only by a gentle pressure

of the tremulous hand resting on his arm did Gustave express his sympathy.

"I cannot tell you how happy I was in those days—so bright, so brief. I cannot tell you how I loved Montagu Kingdon. When I look back to that time of my life, it seems like a picture standing out against a background of darkness, with some strange vivid light shining upon it. It was arranged between Montagu and my sister that we should be married, as soon as his brother, Lord Durnsville, had paid his debts. The payment of the debts was an old promise of Lord Durnsville's, and an imprudent marriage on his brother's part might have prevented the performance of it. This is what Montagu told my sister Charlotte. She begged him to confide in her husband, my kind brother-in-law; but this he refused to do. There came a day very soon after this when James Halliday, my brother-in-law, was told about Montagu Kingdon's visits to the farm. He came home, and found Mr. Kingdon with us, and there was a dreadful scene between them. James forbade Mr. Kingdon ever again to set foot in his house.

He scolded my sister, he warned me. It was all no use. I loved Montagu Kingdon as you say you love me—foolishly, recklessly. I could not disbelieve or doubt him. When he told me of his plans for our marriage, which was to be kept secret until Lord Durnsville had paid his debts, I consented to leave Newhall with him, to be married in London. If he had asked me for my life, I must have given it to him. And how should I disbelieve his promises, when I had lived only amongst people who were truth itself? He knew that I had friends in London, and it was arranged between us that I was to be married from the house of one of them, who had been my girlish companion, and who was now well married. I was to write, telling her of my intended journey to town; and on the following night I was to leave Newhall secretly with Montagu Kingdon. I was to make my peace with my sister and her husband after my marriage. How shall I tell you the rest? From the first to the last he deceived me. The carriage that was, as I believed, to have taken us to London, carried us to Hull.

From Hull we crossed to Hamburg. From that time my story is all shame and misery. I think my heart broke in the hour in which I discovered that I had been cheated. I loved him, and clung to him long after I knew him to be selfish and false and cruel. It seemed to be a part of my nature to love him. My life was not the kind of life one reads of in novels. It was no existence of splendour and luxury and riot, but one long struggle with debt and difficulty. We lived abroad—not for our pleasure, but because Mr. Kingdon could not venture to appear in England. His brother, Lord Durnsville, had never promised to pay his debts. That was a falsehood invented to deceive my sister. For seven long weary years I was his slave, a true and faithful slave; his nurse in illness, his patient drudge at all times. We had been wandering about France for two years, when he brought me to Paris; and it was here that he first began to neglect me. O, if you could know the dreary days and nights I have spent at the hotel on the other side of the river, where we lived, you would pity me!"

"My dear love, my heart is all pity for you," said Gustave. "Do not tell me any more. I can guess the end of the story. There came a day in which neglect gave place to desertion."

"Yes; Mr. Kingdon left me one day, without a warning word to break the blow. I had been waiting and watching for him through two weary days and nights, when there came a letter, to tell me he was on his way to Vienna with a West-Indian gentleman and his daughter. He was to be married to the daughter. It was his poverty, he told me, which compelled this step. He advised me to go back to my friends in Yorkshire. To go back! As if he did not know that death would be easier to me. There was a small sum of money in the letter, on which I have lived since that time. When you first met me here, I had not long received that letter."

This was the end of her story. In the depth of her humiliation she dared not lift her eyes to the face of her companion; but she felt his hand clasp hers, and knew that he was still her friend. This was all she asked of Providence.

To Gustave Lenoble the story had been unutterably painful. He had hoped to hear a tragedy untarnished by shame, and the shame was very bitter to him. This woman whom he loved so fondly was no spotless martyr, the victim of inevitable fate, beautiful and sublime in her affliction. She was only a weak, vain, village beauty who had suffered herself to be lured away from her peaceful home by the falsehoods of a commonplace scoundrel.

The story was common, the shame was common, but it seemed to M. Lenoble that the woman by his side was his destiny; and then, prompt to the rescue of offended pride, of outraged love—tortured to think that she, so distant and pure a creature to him, should have been trampled in the dust by another—came the white-winged angel Pity. By her weakness, by her humiliation, by the memory of her suffering, Pity conjured him to love her so much the more dearly.

"My darling," he said softly, "it is a very sad story, and you and I will never speak of it again. We will bury the memory of Montagu

Kingdon in the deepest grave that was ever dug for bitter remembrances; and we will begin a new life together."

This was the end of M. Lenoble's wooing. He could not speak of his love any more while the sound of Montagu Kingdon's name had but lately died away on Susan Meynell's lips. He had taken her to himself, with all her sorrows and sins, in the hour in which he snatched her from death; and between these two there was no need of passionate protestations or sentimental rapture.

M. Lenoble speedily discovered that the law had made no provision for the necessities of a chivalrous young student eager to unite himself with a friendless foreign woman, who could not produce so much as one of the thirty witnesses required to establish her identity. A very little consideration showed Gustave that a marriage between him and Susan Meynell in France was an impossibility. He explained this, and asked her if she would trust him, as she had trusted Montagu Kingdon. In Jersey the marriage might easily be solemnised. Would she go with him to Jersey,

to stay there so long as the English law required for the solemnisation of their union?

"Why should you take so much trouble about me?" said Susan, in her low sad voice. "You are too good, too generous. I am not worth so much care and thought from you."

"Does that mean that you will not trust me, Susanne?"

"I would trust you with my life in a desert, thousands of miles from the rest of mankind—with a happier life than mine. I have no feeling in my heart but love for you, and faith in you."

After this the rest was easy. The lovers left the Pension Magnotte one bright summer morning, and journeyed to Jersey, where, after a fortnight's sojourn, the English Protestant church united them in the bonds of matrimony.

Susan was a Protestant, Gustave a Catholic, but the difference of religion divided them no more than the difference of country. They came back to Paris directly after the marriage, and M. Lenoble took a very modest lodging for himself and his wife in a narrow street near the Pantheon

—a fourth story, very humbly furnished. M. Lenoble had provided for himself an opportunity of testing the truth of that adage which declares that a purse large enough for one is also large enough for two.

CHAPTER IV.

A DECREE OF BANISHMENT.

After those stormy emotions which accompany the doing of a desperate deed, there comes in the minds of men a dead calm. The still small voice of Wisdom, unheard while Passion's tempest was raging, whispers grave counsel or mild reproof, and Folly, who, seen athwart the storm-cloud, sublime in the glare of the lightning, seemed inspiration, veils her face in the clear common light of day.

Let it not for a moment be supposed that with M. Lenoble time and reflection brought repentance in their train. It was not so. The love which he felt for his English wife was no capricious emotion; it was a passion deep and strong as destiny. The worst that after-thought could reveal to him was

the fact that the step he had taken was a very desperate one.

Before him lay an awful necessity—the necessity of going to Beaubocage to tell those who loved him how their air-built castles had been shattered by this deed of his.

The letters from Cydalise—nay, indeed, more than one letter from his mother, with whom letter-writing was an exceptional business—had of late expressed much anxiety. In less than a month the marriage-contract would be made ready for his signature. Every hour's delay was a new dishonour. He told his wife that he must go home for a few days; and she prepared his travelling gear, with a sweet, dutiful care that seemed to him like the ministration of an angel.

"My darling girl, can I ever repay you for the happiness you have brought me!" he exclaimed as he watched the slight girlish figure flitting about the room, busy with the preparations for his journey.

And then he thought of Madelon Frehlter—commonplace, stiff, and unimpressionable—the

most conventional of school-girls, heavy in face, in figure, in step, in mind even, as it had seemed to him, despite his sister's praises.

He had been too generous to tell Susan of his engagement, of the brilliant prospects he forfeited by his marriage, or the risk which he ran of offending his father by that rash step. But to-night, when he thought of Madelon's dulness and commonness, it seemed to him as if Susan had in a manner rescued him from a dreadful fate—as maidens were rescued from sea-monsters in the days of Perseus and Heracles.

"Madelon is not unlike a whale," he thought. "They tell us that whales are of a sagacious and amiable temper—and Cydalise was always talking of Madelon's good sense and amiability. I am sure it is quite as easy to believe in the unparalleled virtues of the whale as in the unparalleled virtues of Madelon Frehlter."

His valise was packed, and he departed for Beaubocage, after a sad and tender parting from his wife. The journey was a long one in those days, when no express train had yet thundered

across the winding Seine, cleaving its iron way through the bosom of fertile Norman valleys. M. Lenoble had ample time for reflection as he jogged along in the ponderous diligence; and his heart grew more and more heavy as the lumbering vehicle approached nearer to the town of Vevinord, whence he was to make his way to the paternal mansion as best he might.

He walked to Beaubocage, attended by a peasant lad, who carried his portmanteau. The country was very pleasant in the quiet summer evening, but conscious guilt oppressed the heart and perplexity disturbed the mind of M. Gustave Lenoble, and his spirits were in nowise elevated by the walk.

Lights in the lower chambers gleamed dimly athwart the trim garden at Beaubocage. One faint, twinkling candle shone in a little pepper-castor turret, his sister's room. The thought of their glad welcome smote his heart. How could he shape the words that must inform them of their disappointment? And then he thought of the gentle, pensive wife in the Parisian lodging, so

grateful for his devotion, so tender and submissive, —the wife he had rescued from death and eternal condemnation, as it seemed to his pious Catholic mind. The thought of this dear one gave him courage.

"I owe much to my parents," he thought to himself, "but not the privilege to sell me for money. The marriage they want to bring about would be a sordid barter of my heart and my honour."

In a few minutes after this he was standing in the little salon at Beaubocage, with his mother and sister hanging about him and caressing him, his father standing near, less demonstrative, but evidently well pleased by this unexpected arrival of the son and heir.

"I heard thy voice in the hall," cried Cydalise, "and flew down from my room to welcome thee. It seems to me that one can fly on these occasions. And how thou art looking well, and how thou art handsome, and how I adore thee!" cries the damsel, more ecstatic than an English sister on a like occasion. "Dost thou know that

we began to alarm ourselves about thee? Thy letters became so infrequent, so cold. And all the while thou didst plot this surprise for us. Ah, how it is sweet to see thee again!"

And then the mother took up the strain, and anon was spoken the dreaded name of Madelon. She too would be glad—she too had been anxious. The prodigal made no answer. He could not speak—his heart sank within him, he grew cold and pale; to inflict pain on those who loved him was a sharper pain than death.

"Gustave!" cried the mother in sudden alarm, "thou growest pale—thou art ill!—Look then, François, thy son is ill!"

"No, mother, I am not ill," the young man replied gravely. He kissed his mother, and put her gently away from him. In all the years of her after-life she remembered that kiss, cold as death, for it was the farewell kiss of her son.

"I wish to speak a few words with you alone, father," said Gustave.

The father was surprised, but in no manner

alarmed by this request. He led the way to his den, a small and dingy chamber, where there were some dusty editions of the French classics, and where the master of Beaubocage kept accounts and garden-seeds and horse-medicines.

When they were gone, the mother and sister sat by one of the open windows, waiting for them. Without, all was still. Distant lights glimmered through the summer twilight, the lighted windows of Côtenoir.

"How pleased Madelon will be!" said Cydalise, looking towards those glimmering windows. She had really taught herself to believe that the Demoiselle Frehlter was a most estimable young person; but she would have been glad to find more enthusiasm, more brightness and vivacity in her future sister-in-law.

The interview between the father and son seemed long to Madame Lenoble and Cydalise. The two women were curious—nay, indeed, somewhat anxious.

"I fear he has made debts," said the mother, "and is telling thy father of his follies. I know

not how they are to be paid, unless with the dowry of Madelon, and that would seem a dishonourable use of her money."

It was half an hour before any sound broke the stillness of that quiet house. Twilight had thickened into night, when there came a banging of doors and heavy footsteps in the hall. The door of the salon was opened, and M. Lenoble came in alone. At the same moment the outer door closed heavily.

M. Lenoble went straight to the open window and closed the Venetian shutters. He went from thence to the second window, the shutters whereof he fastened carefully, while the women stared at him wonderingly, for it was not his habit to perform this office.

"I am shutting out a vagabond," he said, in a cold, cruel voice.

"Where is Gustave?" cried the mother, alarmed.

"He is gone."

"But he is coming back, is he not, directly?"

"Never while I live!" answered M. Lenoble. "He has married an English adventuress, and is no longer any son of mine."

Book the Second.

DOWNHILL.

CHAPTER I.

THE FATE OF SUSAN LENOBLE.

SEVEN years after that miserable summer night at Beaubocage on which Gustave Lenoble was disowned by his father, a man and woman, with a boy five years of age, were starving in a garret amongst the housetops and chimneys of Rouen. In the busy city these people lived lonely as in a forest, and were as securely hidden from the eyes of all who had ever known them. The man—haggard, dying—cherished a pride that had grown fiercer as the grip of poverty tightened upon him. The woman lived only for her husband and her child.

The man was Gustave Lenoble. The world had gone ill with him since he cast his destiny into the lap of the woman he loved. In all these years no olive-bearing dove had spanned the gulf

that yawned between the prodigal and his father. The seigneur of Beaubocage had been marble. A narrow-minded old man, living his narrow life, and nursing one idea with fanatical devotion, was of all men the least likely to forgive. Vain had been the tears and entreaties of mother and sister. The doors of that joyless dwelling on the fertile flats beyond Vevinord were sealed against the offender with a seal not to be broken, even had he come thither to plead for pardon, which he did not.

"My father would have sold me as negro slaves are sold *là-bas*," he said on those rare occasions when he opened his old wounds, which were to the last unhealed; "I am glad that I escaped the contemptible barter."

He was in very truth glad. Poverty and hardship seemed to him easier to bear than the dreary prosperity of Côtenoir and a wife he could not have loved. The distinguishing qualities of this man's mind were courage and constancy. There are such noble souls born into the world, some to shine with lustre supernal, many to

burn and die in social depths obscure as ocean's deepest cavern.

In his love for the woman he had chosen, Gustave Lenoble never wavered. He worked for her, he endured for her, he hoped against hope for her sake; and it was only when bodily strength failed that this nameless foot-soldier began to droop and falter in life's bitter battle. Things had gone ill with him. He had tried his fate as an advocate in Paris, in Caen, in Rouen; but clients would not come. He had been a clerk, now in one counting-house, now in another, and Susan and he had existed somehow during the seven years of their married life.

They clung to each other with affection that seemed to grow with every new sorrow; nor did love exhibit any inclination to spread his wings and take flight from the window, though poverty came in every day at the door, and sat by the hearth, a familiar companion and an inevitable guest.

The mother and sister contrived to help this poor castaway with the veriest scrapings of a

miserly household. The old man, soured by his great disappointment, grew sordid and covetous with increasing years, and the lives of the women were hard and hopeless. By little cheats, and petty contrivances, and pitiful falsifications of financial statements, they managed to scrape together a few louis now and then for the struggling exile; and to do this was the sole delight of their patient lives. They contrived also to correspond secretly with Gustave, and were informed of the birth of his son.

"Ah, if thou couldst see how beautiful he is," wrote the father, "this child of pure and true love, thou wouldst no longer regret my breach of faith with Madelon Frehlter. I knew not, until now, how like infant-children are to angels. I knew not how true to nature are the angels in the pictures of Raffaelle and Murillo. Thou knowest the print of Murillo's Assumption; the picture is in the Louvre. If thou canst remember that picture, dear mother, thou hast but to recall the face of one of the cherubim about the feet of our Lady, and thou hast the portrait of my boy. He opens

his eyes and looks at me as I write. Ah, that he and I and my Susanne were with thee in the little salon at Beaubocage.—my sister, Susanne, you, and I, united round this darling's cradle! He has been born in poverty; but his birth has made us very happy."

The sentiment of this letter was no spurious or transient feeling. For this child Gustave Lenoble evinced an unchanging fondness. It was indeed no part of his nature to change. The little one was his comfort in affliction, his joy during every brief interval of prosperity. When the battle was well-nigh fought, and he began to feel himself beaten, his chief anxieties, his ever-returning fears, were for his wife and child.

To Susan the thought of parting from him was a despair too deep for tears. She would have been something less than woman if she had not loved her husband with more than common affection. She watched the change that illness brought in the frank face, the stalwart figure; and little by little the awful truth came home to her. The hour was at hand in which she must lose him.

"If you could have rest, Gustave, better medical advice, more comforts, you would soon be strong again. I am sure your father would not refuse to forgive you, now. Write to him, dearest. Go back to Beaubocage, and let your mother and sister nurse you. I will stay here with the little one. It shall be forgotten that you have a wife and child."

"No, dear one; I will not desert you, even for a day, to buy back my father's love. I would rather be here, with you, than in the pleasantest home without you. But we must face the future, Susanne; we must be brave and wise, for the little one's sake. You are not so strong that you can afford to trust blindly in your power to protect him by and by. I have written a letter to my father. He has proved himself a hard man to me, cruel and obdurate beyond all my fears; but I know he is not altogether heartless. When I am dead, you will take the letter in one hand, the child in the other, and go to Beaubocage. I believe he will adopt the boy, and that the little one will give him the comfort and happiness he

hoped from me. He must be very lonely; and I cannot doubt that his heart will melt when he sees the child's face, and hears that he has no longer a son. As for yourself, my poor girl, I see for you no hope except in the old York-shire home, and the friends you fear to see again."

"I no longer fear them," said his wife, with unwonted energy. "I could not go to them seven years ago; but I can go to them as your wife."

"Ah, thank God, the poor name is worth something for you."

"Yes, dear; and I will go back to them—to-morrow."

"To-morrow!"

"To-morrow, Gustave. I have been selfish and cruel to delay so long. The old dread of seeing my sister's reproachful face has been strong enough to hold me back, when a little courage might have enabled me to help you. The burden has been all on you, and I have done nothing. O, what a wretch I must have been to sit idly by and see you suffer, and make no effort to help you!"

"But, my darling, you have not been idle. You have been the dearest and most industrious of wives, and have helped me to bear my burden. You have done more, dear—you have made my burden pleasant to me."

"I will try to lighten it, Gustave," cried Susan, with excitement. "O, why, why did I never try before! My sister and her husband are well off—rich perhaps. If they are still living, if no cruel changes have come to pass at Newhall, they could help us with a little money. They might even give us a home. I will start for England to-morrow."

"Nay, my dear, you are not strong enough to travel so far alone. It seems, indeed, a happy thought this of your rich relations; but you must not undertake such a journey. You might write."

"No, Gustave, I will trust to no letter; I will go. It will be no pain for me to humble myself for your sake. I will go straight to my sister. I know what a tender compassionate heart it is that I shall appeal to."

There was much discussion; but Susan was

resolute. To scrape together the money for the journey, she made efforts that were heroic in a nature so weak as hers. She went to the Monte de Piété with the last of her little treasures,—that one dear trinket to which she had clung even when hunger was at the door,—the gimmal, or alliance, ring, that Gustave had placed upon her finger before God's altar,—the double symbolic circlet which bore on one side her name, on the other her husband's. This dearest of all her possessions she surrendered for a few francs, to make up the sum needful for her journey.

What it cost her to do this, what it cost her to tear herself away from her sick husband and her only child, who shall say? There are pangs that cannot be counted, agonies that will come within no calculation—the infinite of pain. She went. Two kind souls, a labourer and his wife, lodgers in the same garret-story, promised to care for and help the invalid and the child. There is no desolation in which a child will not find a friend.

The journey was long and fatiguing; the anguish of her poor aching heart almost too much

for endurance; a heart so heavy that even hope could scarce flutter it. It was dull damp weather, though in the middle of summer. The solitary traveller caught cold on the journey, and arrived in London in a high fever. Ill, faint, and helpless, the great city seemed to her unspeakably dismal—most stony of all stony-hearted mothers, to this wretched orphan. She could go no farther than the darksome city-inn where the coach from Southampton brought her. She had come *viâ* Havre. Here she sank prostrate, and had barely sufficient strength to write an incoherent letter to her sister, Mrs. Halliday, of Newhall farm, near Huxter's Cross, Yorkshire.

The sister came as fast as the fastest coach on the great Northern road could carry her. There was infinite joy in that honest sisterly heart over this one sinner's repentance. Fourteen years had gone by since the young city-bred beauty had fled with that falsest of men, and most hardened of profligates, Montagu Kingdon; and tidings from Susan were unlooked for and thrilling as a message from the grave.

Alas for the adverse fate of Susan Meynell! The false step of her youth had set her for ever wrong upon life's highway. When kind Mrs. Halliday came, Gustave Lenoble's wife was past her help; wandering in her mind; a girl again, but newly run away from her peaceful home; and with no thought save of remorse for her misdeeds.

The seven years of her married life seemed to have faded out of her mind. She raved of Montagu Kingdon's baseness, of her own folly, her vain regret, her yearning for pardon; but of the dying husband in the garret at Rouen she uttered no word. And so, with her weary head upon her sister's breast, she passed away, her story untold, no wedding-ring on her wasted finger to bear witness that she died an honest man's wife; no letters or papers in her poor little trunk to throw light on the fourteen years in which she had been a castaway.

Mrs. Halliday stayed in London to see the wanderer laid in the quiet city churchyard where her family rested, and where for her was chosen

an obscure corner in which she might repose forgotten and unknown.

But not quite nameless. Mrs. Halliday could not leave the grave unmarked by any record of the sister she had loved. The stone above the grave of Gustave's wife bore her maiden name, and the comforting familiar text about the one sinner who repenteth.

CHAPTER II.

FORGIVEN TOO LATE.

For a week of long days and longer nights there was no step sounded on the stair, no opening or shutting of a door in the old dilapidated house where he lay languishing on the brink of an open grave, that did not move Gustave Lenoble with a sudden emotion of hope. But the footsteps came and went, the doors were opened and shut, again and again, and the traveller so waited, so hoped for, did not return.

The boy—the brave, bright son, who seemed to inherit all that was noblest and best in his father's nature—pined for his mother. The man endured a martyrdom worse than the agony of Damiens, the slow tortures of La Barre. What had befallen her? That she could desert him or

his child was a possibility that never shaped itself in his mind. *That* drop of poison was happily wanting in his cup; and the bitterness of death was sweet compared to the scorpion-sting of such a supposition.

She did not return. Calamity in some shape had overtaken her—calamity dire as death; for with life and reason, she could not have failed to send some token, some tidings, to those she loved. The sick man waited a week after the day on which he had begun to expect her return. At the end of that time he rose, with death in his face, and went out to look for her—to look for her in Rouen, for her whom the instinct of his heart told him was far away from that city: as far as death from life. He went to the Cour des Messageries, and loitered and waited amidst the bustle of arriving and departing diligences, with a half-imbecile hope that she would alight from one of them. The travellers came and went, pushing and hustling him in their selfish haste. When night came he went back to his garret. All was quiet. The boy slept with the children

of his good neighbour, and was comforted by the warmth of that strange hearth.

Gustave lit his candle, a last remaining morsel.

"You will last my time, friend," he said with a wan smile.

He seated himself at the little table, pushed aside the medicine-bottles, searched for a stray sheet of letter-paper, and then began to write.

He wrote to his mother, telling her that death was at hand, and that the time had come in which she must succour her son's orphan child. With this he enclosed a letter to his father—that letter of which he had spoken to his wife, and which had been written in the early days of his illness. This packet he directed to Madame Lenoble, at Beaubocage. There was no longer need for secrecy.

"When those letters are delivered, I shall be past blame and past forgiveness," he thought.

In the morning he was dead.

The neighbours posted the letter. The neighbours comforted and protected the child for two days; and then there came a lady, very sad, very

quiet, who wept bitterly in the stillness of that attic-chamber where Gustave Lenoble lay; and who afterwards, with a gentle calmness of manner that was very sweet to see, made all necessary arrangements for a humble, but not a mean or ignominious, funeral.

"He was my brother," she said to the good friends of the neighbouring garret. "We did our best to help him, my mother and I; but we little thought how bitterly he wanted help. The brave heart would not suffer us to know that."

And then she thanked them with much tenderness for their charity to the dead man; and with these good people she went on foot through the narrow streets of the city to see her brother laid in his grave.

Until this was done, the mournful lady, who was not yet thirty years of age and of a placid nun-like beauty, abandoned herself to no transport of love for her orphan nephew; but when that last office of affection had been performed, she took the little one on her knees, and folded him to her breast, and gave him her heart, as she

had given it long ago to his father; for this gentle unselfish creature was one who must needs have some shrine at which to offer her daily sacrifice of self. Already she was beginning to think how the orphan was to be cared for, and the widow also, for whose return she looked daily.

For the return of Susan Lenoble, Cydalise waited at Rouen several days after the funeral. She had, happily, an old schoolfellow comfortably established in the city; and in the house of this old friend she found a home. No one but her mother and this friend, whom she could trust, knew of the business that had brought her from Beaubocage. In seven years the father had never uttered his only son's name; in all the seven years that name had never been spoken in his hearing.

When three weeks had gone by since the departure of Susan for England, all hope of her return was abandoned by Mademoiselle Lenoble and the neighbours who had known the absent woman.

"She had the stamp of death on her face when she went away," said the labourer's wife, "as surely

as it was on him that she left. I told her she had no strength for the journey; but she would go: there was no moving her from that. She had rich friends *là-bas*, who might help her husband. It was for that she went. That thought seemed to give her a kind of fever, and the strength of fever."

"And there has come no letter—nothing?"

"Nothing, mademoiselle."

On this, Cydalise determined to return to Beaubocage. She could not well leave the child longer on the hands of these friendly people, even by paying for his maintenance, which she insisted on doing, though they would fain have shared their humble *pot-à-feu* and coarse loaf with him unrecompensed. She determined on a desperate step. She would take her brother's orphan child back with her, and leave the rest to Providence—to the chance of some sudden awakening of natural affection in a heart that had long languished in a kind of torpor that was almost death.

The little fellow pined sadly for those dear familiar faces, those tender soothing voices, that

had vanished so suddenly from his life. But the voice of his aunt was very sweet and tender, and had a tone that recalled the father who was gone. With this kind aunt he left Rouen in the lumbering old vehicle that plied daily betwixt that city and Vevinord.

"Thou canst call me Cydalise for a while, my little one," she said to him; for she did not wish the child to proclaim the relationship between them yet awhile.

Ah, what bitter tears the two women shed over the soft fair curls of that little head, when they had the boy all to themselves in the turret-chamber at Beaubocage, on whose white walls the eyes of Cydalise had opened almost every morning of her pure eventless life!

"Why dost thou cry so, madame?" the child asked of his grandmother, as she held him in her arms, kissing and weeping over him; "and what have they done with my father—and mamma too? She went away one day, but she told me that she would came back, so quickly, ah, so quickly! and the days passed, and they shut papa in his room,

and would not let me go to him; and mamma did not come, though I asked the Blessed Virgin to send her back to me."

"Dear child, thy father and mother are in a brighter place than this hard world, where they had so much sorrow," Madame Lenoble answered gently.

"Yes, they were often sorry," murmured the boy thoughtfully. "It was because of money; but then, when there was no money, mamma cried and kissed me, and kissed papa, and the good papa kissed us both, and somehow it always ended in happiness."

François Lenoble was, happily, absent on this day of tribulation. The women took their fill of sorrow, but it was sorrow mingled with a strange bitter sweetness that was almost joy. The seigneur of Beaubocage had gone to dine, as he still often did, with his old friend Baron Frehlter; for the breach of faith which had caused a lifelong disunion of father and son had not

divided the two proprietors. Nay, indeed, the Baron had been generous enough to plead the cause of the castaway.

"A man cannot dispose at will of his affections, my friend," he urged; "and it was more generous in your son to break faith with my daughter before marriage than after."

Mademoiselle Frehlter had not broken her heart on account of her lover's falsehood. She had been sufficiently indignant on the occasion, and had been more impatient of her mother's pet priest and pet poodle during the brief period in which she wore the willow. She had recovered her good-humour, however, on being wooed by a young subaltern in a cavalry regiment, stationed at Vevinord, the offshoot of a grander house than that of Lenoble, and whose good looks and good lineage had ultimately prevailed with the Baron. That gentleman had by no means too good an opinion of the son-in-law thus forced upon him; but peace was the highest good (with unlimited tobacco) to which his germanic soul aspired; and for the sake of peace in the present, he was con-

tent to hazard his daughter's happiness in the future.

"*That* is very brilliant," he said of M. Paul de Nérague, the young lieutenant of light cavalry; "but it is not solid, like Gustave. Your son is honest, candid; a brave heart. It was for that I would have given him Madelon. But it is Providence which disposes of us, as our good father St. Velours tells us very often; and one must be content. Young Nérague pleases my daughter, and I must swallow him, though for me he smells too strong of the barracks: *ça flaire la caserne, mon ami.*"

That odour of the barracks which distinguished the sub-lieutenant Paul de Nérague became more odious after his marriage with the virtuous Madelon, when he was established—*niché*, as he himself called it—in very comfortable, though somewhat grusome, apartments at Côtenoir. His riotous deportment, his hospitable disposition, as displayed in the frequent entertainment of his brothers-in-arms at the expense of his father-in-law, his Don-Juan-like demeanour in relation to

the housemaids and kitchen-wenches of the château, innocent enough in the main, but on that account so much the more audacious, struck terror to the hearts of Madame Frehlter and her daughter, and the elder lady was much gratified by that thirst for foreign territory which carried the greater part of the French army and the regiment of the vivacious Paul to the distant wilds of Algeria.

The virtuous Madelon was too stolid to weep for her husband. But even her stolidity was not proof against the fiery influence of jealousy, and, waking and sleeping, her visions were of veiled damsels of Orient assailing the too inflammable heart of Lieutenant de Nérague.

The young officer was yet absent at that period in which Cydalise returned from Rouen with her brother's child.

The little boy was sleeping peacefully in a cot beside his aunt's bed (it had been his father's cot thirty years ago) when François Lenoble returned from Côtenoir that night.

It was not till the next day that he saw the child. He had been making his usual morning's round in the gardens and orchards, when he came into the salon, and saw the little boy seated near his grandmother's chair, playing with some dominoes.

Something—perhaps the likeness to his dead son—the boy's black clothes, for Cydalise had contrived to dress him in decent mourning—struck suddenly on the old man's heart.

"Who is that boy?" he asked, with a strange earnestness.

"Your son Gustave's only child," answered his wife gently,—"his orphan child."

François Lenoble looked at her, and from her to the boy; tried to speak, but could not; beckoned the child, and then dropped heavily into a chair and sobbed aloud.

Until this moment no one had ever seen him shed a tear for the son he had put away from his home—and, as it had seemed, from his heart. Not by one sigh, not by one mournful utterance of the familiar name, had he betrayed the depth

of that wound which he had endured, silently, obstinately, in all these years.

They suffered him to bemoan his dead son, unhindered by stereotyped consolations. The two women stood by, and pitied him in silence. The little boy stared wonderingly, and at last crept up to the sorrow-stricken father.

"Why do you cry, poor old man?" he asked. "You have not lost your papa and mamma, as I have lost mine, have you? I want to stay with you and be your little boy, please. She told me to say that," he added, pointing to Cydalise.—"And I have said it right, haven't I?" he asked of the same lady.—"I think I shall love you, because you are like my papa, only older and uglier," the little one concluded, with angelic candour.

The seigneur of Beaubocage dried his tears with an effort. Beaubocage—Côtenoir. Ah, me, what empty sounds those two once magic names seemed to him now that his son's life had been sacrified to so paltry an ambition, so sordid a passion, so vile and grovelling a desire! He took

the boy on his knee, and kissed him tenderly. His thoughts bridged over a chasm of five-and-twenty years, as his lips pressed that fair young brow; and it was his own son—the son whom he had disowned—whose soft hair was mingling itself now with the gray bristles on his rugged chin.

"My child," he murmured softly, "the fear is that I shall love thee too well, and be to thee as much too weakly indulgent as I was wickedly stern to thy father. Anything is easier to humanity than justice."

This was said to himself rather than to the boy.

"Tell me thy name, little one," he asked presently, after a few moments' pensive meditation.

"I have two names, monsieur."

"Thou must call me grandfather. And the two names?"

"François Gustave."

"I shall call thee Gustave."

"But papa always called me François, and

mamma said it was the name of a cruel man; but papa said he loved the name—"

"Ah, no more, little one!" cried the lord of Beauboeage suddenly: "thou knowest not with what dagger-thrusts thou dost pierce this poor old heart."

CHAPTER III.

GUSTAVE THE SECOND.

The little Gustave grew and flourished. Such love was lavished on him as rarely falls to the lot of children, though the spring of many lives may be rich in love's pure white blossom. The existence of this child seemed all happiness. He brought hope, and a sense of atonement, and all sweet things, to the quiet family of Beaubocage; and as he grew from childhood to boyhood, from boyhood to manhood, it seemed to that household as if the first Gustave of their love had never been taken from them. That Orphic fable of Zagreus repeats itself in many households. For the one bright creature lost, another is given; and then comes a time when it is almost difficult to separate the image of the missing one from the dear substitute who so nearly fills his place.

François Lenoble and wife enjoyed a green old age, and the affection of their grandson made the cup of life sweet for them to the very dregs. There are, happily, some natures which indulgence cannot injure; some luxuriant flowers which attain strength as well as beauty under the influence of these tropical heats of affection. Gustave the second possessed all the noble qualities of Gustave the first. Frank, generous, brave, constant, affectionate, light-hearted, he shone on the failing eyes of his kindred radiant as a young Apollo, brave as a mortal Hercules.

Those things which the ignorant heart has at some time so passionately desired are apt to be granted when the desire has grown somewhat cold and dead. Thus it was with the ambition of François Lenoble. He lived to see the lands of Côtenoir and Beaubocage united in the person of his grandson, who married Clarice, the only surviving child of M. and Madame de Nérague. Two sons and a daughter had been born at Côtenoir; but the sons withered and faded in early boyhood, and even the daughter, though con-

sidered a flourishing plant in that poor garden of weakling blossoms, was but a fragile creature.

The old people at Beaubocage survived the seigneur and châtelaine of Côtenoir by some years, and survived also the fiery lieutenant, who fell in Algeria without having attained his captaincy, or added any military renown to the good old name of De Nérague in his own magnificent person.

François saw his grandson established at Côtenoir before he died. He expired with his hand in that of Gustave, whom, in the half-consciousness of that last hour, he mistook for the son he had disowned.

"What door was that that shut?" he asked in an eager whisper. "Who said I turned my son out of doors—my only son? It's false! I couldn't have done it! Hark! there's the door shutting again! It sounds like the door of a tomb."

After this he dozed a little, and woke with a smile on his face.

"I have been dreaming of thy father, Gus-

tave," he said calmly. "I thought that I saw him with a light shining in his face, and that he kissed and forgave me."

This was the end. The faithful wife was not slow to follow her husband to the grave, and there was now only a placid maiden lady at Beaubocage, Mademoiselle Cydalise Lenoble, whom every one within ten leagues of Vevinord knew and loved. A lay Abbess, a Sister of Mercy in all save the robes; a tender creature, who lived only to do good.

Ten years passed, and M. Lenoble of Côtenoir was a widower, with two fair young daughters at a convent-school on the outskirts of Vevinord, and a boisterous son at an academy in Rouen. Gustave had never followed any profession; the lands of Beaubocage secured him a competence, so prudently had the small estate been managed by the kindred who adored him. His marriage had given him fortune. He had no need of trade or profession. His life was laid out for him like a prim Dutch flower-garden. He was to live

at Côtenoir, and look after his estate, and smoke his pipe, as Baron Frehlter had done, and be a good husband to his wife, a kind father to his children. This latter part of his duty came natural to M. Lenoble. It was not in him to be otherwise than kind to women and children. His invalid wife praised him as a model of marital perfection. It was Gustave who wheeled her sofa from one room to another, Gustave who prepared her medicines, Gustave whose careful hands adjusted curtains and *portières*. The poor woman lived and died believing herself the happiest of wives. She mistook kindness for love.

M. Lenoble bore his wife's demise with Christian calmness. He was sorry that the fragile creature should have been taken so early from the pleasant home that was hers by right, but of passionate grief, or dreary sense of irreparable loss, there was none in that manly heart. There were times when the widower reproached himself for this want of feeling; but in very truth Madame Lenoble, *jeune*, had lived and died a nonenity. Her departure left no empty place;

even her children scarcely missed her. The father was all-in-all.

Gustave had married at twenty years of age. He was twenty-nine when his wife died. His eldest daughter, Clarice, eight; his second, Madelon, seven; the boy, a spoilt young dog of five, not yet despatched to the great school at Rouen.

But in '65 Mademoiselle Clarice was fifteen years of age, and a very charming performer on the pianoforte, as the good nuns at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, at Vevinord, told the father. Mademoiselle Madelon was looking forward to her fourteenth anniversary, and she too was a very pretty pianist, and altogether a young prodigy of learning and goodness, as the nuns told the master of Côtenoir. The demoiselles of Côtenoir stood high in the estimation of pupils and mistress; they were a kind of noblesse; and the simple-minded superioress spoke of these young persons with some pride when she described her establishment to a stranger. It was a very comfortable little colony, a small world enclosed by high walls. The good

mothers who taught and cherished the children were for the greater part ladies of superior and even exalted station; and there was a gentleness, a tenderness in their care for these young lambs not always to be insured by the payment of an annual stipend.

It must be confessed that the young lambs were apt to be troublesome, and required a good deal of watching. To the eye of the philosopher that convent school would have afforded scope for curious study; for it is singular to discover what exceptional vices the youthful mind can develop from its inner consciousness, in homes as pure as this. There were black sheep even in the convent of the Sacré Cœur, damsels marked with a sign that meant "dangerous."

Happily for Gustave Lenoble, his daughters were amongst the brightest and the purest of those girl-graduates. They gave him no trouble, except when they asked him for a home.

"It seems so dull and dreary at Côtenoir, papa," they said, "though you are always so kind. It doesn't seem like home. Beaubocage

is more home-like. At Côtenoir, when you are out, there is no one to talk to; and we have no little parties, no excursions into the country, none of those pleasures which the other girls tell us they have during the holidays."

This was the gist of the lamentations of Mademoiselles Clarice and Madelon; and the father knew not how to supply the mysterious something which was wanting to make Côtenoir a pleasant home. The girls could complain of no restraint, or pine for no indulgence, since their father was always prompt to gratify every whim. But there was some element of happiness wanting, nevertheless; and M. Lenoble perceived that it was so. The life at Côtenoir was desultory, straggling; an existence of perpetual dawdling; a life of shreds and patches, half-formed resolutions, projects begun and broken off in the middle. The good genius, the household angel, order, was wanting in that mansion. There was waste, dirt, destruction of all kinds, in the rambling old château; old servants, too weak or too lazy to work; old tradesmen, presuming on old-established habits of im-

position, unquestioned so long as to have become a right—for the feudal system of fine and forfeiture has only changed hands. The power still flourishes, only it is the villein who takes tithe of his lord.

The servants at Côtenoir had gone their own ways with but little interference since the death of Madame de Néragne, which occurred two years before that of her daughter Clarice Lenoble. Poor invalid Clarice had been quite unable to superintend her household; and since her death Mademoiselle Cydalise had been too feeble of health to assume any authority in her nephew's establishment, even if the household of Côtenoir would have submitted to interference from Beaubocage, which in all likelihood they would not.

Thus it happened that things had taken their own course at the château, and the course had been somewhat erratic. There is nothing so costly as muddle, and Gustave Lenoble had of late begun to perceive that he had the maximum of expense with the minimum of comfort. Meanwhile the kind old aunt at Beaubocage gave her nieces much

valuable advice against the time when they should be old enough to assume the management of their father's house. The sweet unselfish lady of Beaubocage had indeed undergone hard experience in the acquirement of the domestic art. Heaven and her own memory alone recorded those scrapings and pinchings and nice calculations of morsels by which she had contrived to save a few pounds for her outcast brother. Such sordid economics show but poorly on earth; but it is probable that in the mass of documentary evidence which goes before the Great Judge, Mademoiselle Lenoble's account-book will be placed on the right side.

Book the Third.

THE HORATIAD.

CHAPTER I.

CHIEFLY RETROSPECTIVE.

Captain Paget went his way to Rouen in a placid but not an exulting mood, after parting with his young friend Valentine Hawkehurst at the London Bridge terminus of the Brighton line. He was setting out upon an adventure wild and impracticable as the quest of Jason and his Argonauts; and this gallant captain was a carpet-knight, sufficiently adventurous and audacious in the diplomatic crusades of society, but in nowise eager to hazard his life on tented field and in thick press of war. If the Fates had allowed the accomplished Horatio to choose his own destiny, he would have elected to live in the immediate neighbourhood of St. James's Street, from the first day to the last of the London season, and to dine artistically and discreetly at one of those

older and more exclusive clubs dear and familiar to him from the bright years of his youth. He was by nature a *flâneur*, a gossip, a lover of expensive luxuries and frivolous pleasures. He was not only incapable of a high thought himself, but was an unbeliever in the possibility of high thoughts or noble principles in the world he lived in. He measured the universe by that narrow scrap of tape which was the span of his own littleness. To him Cæsar was an imperial brigand, Cicero a hypocritical agitator. To him all great warriors were greedy time-servers like John Churchill; all statesmen plausible placemen; all reformers self-seeking pretenders. Nor did Captain Paget wish that it should be otherwise. In his ideal republic, unselfishness and earnestness would have rendered a man rather a nuisance than otherwise. With the vices of his fellow-men the diplomatic Horatio was fully competent to deal; but some of his most subtle combinations on the chess-board of life would have been checkmated by an unexpected encounter with intractable virtue.

The necessity of living was the paramount con-

sideration to which this gentleman had given his mind from the time when he found himself a popular subaltern in a crack regiment, admired for his easy manners and good looks, respected by meaner men for his good blood, and rich in everything except that vulgar dross without which the life of West-end London is so hollow a delusion, so bitter a comedy of mean shifts and lying devices.

That freebooter of civilisation, the man who lives by his wits, is subject to strange fluctuations from prosperity to adversity. He is the miner or gold-digger of civilised life; and as there are times when his pickaxe strikes suddenly on a rich lode, so there are dreary intervals in which his spade turns up nothing but valueless clay, and the end of each day's work leaves him with no better evidence of his wasted labour than the aching limbs which he drags at nightfall to his dismal shanty.

For some months Captain Paget had found Philip Sheldon a very useful acquaintance. The stockbroker had been the secret inaugurator of two or three joint-stock companies, though figuring to

the outer world only as director; and in the getting-up of these companies Horatio had been a useful instrument, and had received liberal payment for his labours. Unhappily, so serene an occupation as promoting cannot go on for ever; or rather, cannot remain for ever in the same hands. The human mind is naturally imitative, and the plagiarisms of commerce are infinitely more audacious than the small larcenies of literature. The joint-stock company market became day by day more crowded. No sooner did Philip Sheldon float the Non-destructive Laundry Company, the admirable organisation of which would offer a guarantee against the use of chloride of lime and other destructive agencies in the wash-tub, than a rival power launched a colourable imitation thereof, in the Union-is-Strength Domestic Lavatory Company, with a professor of chemistry specially as inspector of wash-tubs. Thus it was that, after the profitable ripening of three such schemes, Mr. Sheldon deemed it advisable to retire from the field, and await a fitter time for the further exercise of his commercial genius.

Captain Paget's relations with the stockbroker did not, however, terminate with the cessation of his labours as secretary, jack-of-all-trades, and promoter. Having found him, so far, clever, and to all appearance trustworthy—and this was an important point, for no man so much needs honourable service as a rogue—Philip Sheldon determined upon confiding to Horatio the conduct of a more delicate business than anything purely commercial. After that discovery of the telegraphic message sent by his brother George to Valentine Hawkehurst, and the further discovery of the advertisement relating to the unclaimed wealth of the lately deceased John Haygarth, Mr. Sheldon lost no time in organising his plans for his own aggrandisement at the expense of his brother.

"George refused to let me in for a share of chances when I showed myself willing to help him," thought Philip. "He may discover by and by that I have contrived to let myself into his secrets; and that he might have played a better game by consenting to a partnership."

A life devoted to his own interests, and a

consistent habit of selfishness, had rendered Mr. Sheldon, of the Lawn, Bayswater, and Stags Court, City, very quick of apprehension in all matters connected, immediately or remotely, with the making of money. The broken sentences of the telegram betrayed by the blotting-pad told him a great deal. They told him that there was a certain Goodge, in the town of Ullerton, who possessed letters so valuable to George Sheldon, as to be bought by his agent Valentine Hawkehurst. Letters for which George Sheldon was willing to give money must needs be of considerable importance, since money was a very scarce commodity with that hunter of unconscious heirs-at-law. Again, a transaction which required the use of so expensive a medium as the electric telegraph rather than the penny-post, might be fairly supposed a transaction of some moment. The letters in question might relate to some other estate than that of John Haygarth, for it was quite possible that the schemer of Gray's-Inn had other irons in the fire. But this was a question of no moment to Philip Sheldon.

If the letters—or the information contained therein—were likely to be useful to George, they might be useful to him. If George found it worth his while to employ an agent at Ullerton, why should not he (Philip) have his agent in the same town? The pecuniary risk, which might be a serious affair to George, was child's-play for Philip, who had always plenty of money, or, at any rate, the command of money. The whole business of heir-at-law-hunting seemed to the stockbroker a very vague and shadowy piece of work, as compared to the kind of speculation that was familiar to him; but he knew that men had made money in such a manner, and any business by which money could be made was interesting to him. Beyond this, the notion of cutting the ground from under his brother's feet had a certain attraction for him. George's manner to him had been somewhat offensive on more than one occasion since—well, since Tom Halliday's death. Mr. Sheldon had borne that offensiveness in mind, with the determination to "take it out of" his brother on the earliest opportunity.

It seemed as if the opportunity had arrived, and Philip was not one of those men who wait shivering on the shore when Fortune's tide is at the flood. Mr. Sheldon launched his bark upon the rising waters, and within two hours of his discovery in the telegraph-office was closeted with Horatio Paget in the little parlour in Omega-street, making arrangements for the captain's journey to Ullerton.

That Horatio was the right man for the work he wanted done, Mr. Sheldon had been quick to perceive.

"He knows Hawkehurst, and will be able to reckon up any manœuvres of his better than a stranger; and is, I think, altogether as deep an old gentleman as one could hope to meet with, barring *the* traditional gentleman who did odd jobs for Dr. Faustus," the stockbroker said to himself, as his hansom sped along Park Lane on its way to Chelsea. The eagerness with which Captain Paget took up the idea of this business was very agreeable to his patron.

"This is an affair in which success hinges

on time," said Mr. Sheldon; "so, if you mean to go in for the business, you must start for Ullerton by the two-o'clock express. You'll have just time to throw your razors and a clean shirt into a carpet-bag while I talk to you. I've got a cab outside, and a good one, that will take you to Euston Square in half-an-hour."

The Captain showed himself prompt in action. His bed-chamber was a small apartment at the back of the parlour, and here he packed his bag while conversing with his employer.

"If you get upon the ground in time, you may obtain a look at the letters before they are handed over to Hawkehurst, or you may outbid him for them," said Mr. Sheldon; "but remember, whatever you do must be so done as to keep Hawkehurst and George completely in the dark as to our proceedings. If once they find out we are on their track, our chances will be gone, for they have got the information and we haven't; and it's only by following close in their footsteps we can hope to do anything."

"That is understood," replied the Captain,

stooping over his bag; "I shall keep myself as close as possible, you may depend upon it. And it shan't be my fault if Valentine sees me or hears of me. I shall want money, by the by; for one can't stir a step in this sort of affair without ready cash."

"I am quite aware of that. I stopped at the West-end branch of the Unitas and cashed a cheque for forty pounds. You can do a good deal in the way of bribery for forty pounds, in such a place as Ullerton. What you have to do is to keep your eye on Hawkehurst, and follow up every channel of information that he opens for you. He has the clue to the labyrinth, remember, the reel of cotton, or whatever it was, that the young woman gave that Roman fellow. All you have to do is to get hold of it, and follow your leader," continued Philip, with his watch in his hand. "This business of the letters will be sharp work, for the chances are against us here, as it's more than likely the papers will have changed hands before you can get to Ullerton. But if you can't buy the letters, you may

buy the information contained in them, and that is the next best thing. Your first move will be to ferret out this man Goodge. Everybody knows everybody else in such a place as Ullerton, large and busy as the town is, and you won't find that difficult. When you see Goodge, you'll know how to deal with him. The mode and manner of your dealing I leave to yourself. You are a man of the world, and will know how to manipulate the gentleman, whoever he may be. And now lock your bag, and cut down stairs as fast as you can. Time's up. Here's your money—three tens, two fives. Good-day."

CHAPTER II.

EPISTOLARY.

From Horatio Paget to Philip Sheldon.

Royal Hotel, Ullerton, Oct. 7, 186—.

My dear Sir,—I arrived here last evening just in time to run against Hawkehurst on the platform, which was rather a provoking encounter at the outset. He went further north by the same train that brought me from London. This train only stops at three places after Ullerton—Slowport, Black Harbour, and Manchester; and I shall take pains to discover which of these towns was Hawkehurst's destination. There was one satisfaction in seeing his departure by this train, inasmuch as it assured me that I had the ground clear for my own operations.

I had no difficulty in discovering the whereabouts of Goodge—*the* Goodge we want—and at

eight o'clock was comfortably seated in that gentleman's parlour, talking over the affair of the letters. Tolerably quick work, I think you will allow, my dear sir, for a man whose years have fallen into the sere and yellow leaf.

Mr. Goodge is a Methodist parson—a class of person I have always detested. I found him peculiarly amenable to monetary influence. I need scarcely tell you that I was careful to conceal my identity from this person. I made so bold as to borrow the cognomen of an old-established firm of solicitors in the Fields, and took a somewhat high tone throughout the interview. I informed Mr. Goodge that the young man who had called on him with reference to certain letters connected with the affairs of the Haygarth family—and I perceived from Mr. Goodge's face that we were on the right track—was a person of disreputable character, engaged in an underhand transaction calculated to injure a respected client of our house. I saw that the words "house" and "our" were talismanic in their effect upon the Methodist parson. You see, my dear sir,

there is no one can manage this sort of thing so well as a gentleman. It comes natural to him. Your vulgar diplomatist seldom knows how to begin, and never knows when to stop. Here I had this low-bred Methodist fellow impressed by the idea of my individual and collective importance after five minutes' conversation. "But this comes too near the praising of myself; therefore hear other things," as the Bard observes.

A very little further conversation rendered Mr. Goodge malleable. I found that Hawkehurst had approached him in the character of your brother's articled clerk, but under his own proper name. This is one point gained, since it assures me that Valentine is not skulking here under a feigned name; and will enable me to shape my future inquiries about him accordingly. I also ascertained Hawkehurst's whereabouts when in Ullerton. He stays at a low commercial house called the Black Swan. It appears that the man Goodge possesses a packet of letters written by a certain Mrs. Rebecca Haygarth, wife of one Matthew Haygarth. In what relationship this

Matthew may stand to the intestate is to be discovered. It is evident he is an important link in the chain, or your brother would not want the letters. I need not trouble you with our conversation in detail. In gross it amounted to this: Mr. Goodge had pledged himself to hand over Mrs. Haygarth's letters, forty or so in number, to Hawkehurst in consideration of twenty pounds. They would have been already in Hawkehurst's possession, if Mr. Goodge had not objected to part with them except for ready money. In consideration of a payment of twenty pounds from me, he was willing to let me read all the letters, and select any ten I pleased to take. This bargain was not arrived at without considerable discussion, but it certainly struck me as a good one.

I opened the packet of papers then and there, and sat up until six o'clock the next morning, reading Mrs. Haygarth's letters in Mr. Goodge's parlour. Very fatiguing occupation for a man of my years. Mr. Goodge's hospitality began and ended in a cup of coffee. Such coffee! and

I remember the Mocha I used to get at Arthur's thirty years ago,—a Promethean beverage, that illumined the dullest smoking-room bore with a flash of wit or a glimmer of wisdom.

I enclose the ten letters which I have selected. They appear to me to tell the history of Mrs. Haygarth and her husband pretty plainly; but there is evidently something mysterious lurking behind the commonplace existence of the husband. That is a matter for future consideration. All I have to do in the present is to keep you as well informed as your brother. It may strike you that the letters I forward herewith, which are certainly the cream of the correspondence, and the notes I have made from the remaining letters, are scarcely worth the money paid for them. In reply to such an objection, I can only say that you get more for *your* money than your brother George will get for his.

The hotel at which I have taken up my quarters is but a few paces from the commoner establishment where Hawkehurst is stopping. He is to call on Goodge for the letters to-day; so his excursion

will be of brief duration. I find that the name of Haygarth is not unknown in this town, as there are a family of Judsons, some of whom call themselves Haygarth Judson. I intend inviting my landlord—a very superior person for his station—to discuss a bottle of wine with me after my chop this evening, and hope to obtain some information from him. In the mean time I shall keep myself close. It is of vital consequence that I should remain unseen by Hawkehurst. I do not believe he saw me on the platform last night, though we were as close to each other as we well could be.

Let me know what you think of the letters, and believe me to be, my dear sir,

Very faithfully yours,

H. N. C. Paget.

Philip Sheldon, Esq.,
&c. &c. &c.

Philip Sheldon to Horatio Paget.

Bayswater, Oct. 8, 186–.

Dear Paget,—The letters are mysterious, and I don't see my way to getting much good out of them, but heartily approve your management of

matters, and give you *carte blanche* to proceed, according to your own lights.

Yours truly, P. S.

Horatio Paget to Philip Sheldon.

Royal Hotel, Oct. 9, 186–.

My dear Sir,—The cultivation of my landlord has been very profitable. The house is the oldest in the town, and the business has descended in a direct line from father to son since the time of George the Second. This man's grandfather entertained the officers of William Duke of Cumberland, honoured by his contemporaries with the sobriquet of Billy the Butcher, during the "forty-five." I had to listen to and applaud a good many stories about Billy the Butcher before I could lead my landlord round to the subject of the Haygarths. But he was not more prosy than many men I have met at dinner-parties in the days when the highest circles in the land were open to your humble servant.

The Haygarth family, of which the intestate John Haygarth was the last male descendant,

were for a long period inhabitants of this town, and obtained their wealth by trading as grocers and general dealers in a shop not three hundred yards from the room in which I write. The building is still standing, and a curious, old-fashioned-looking place it is. The last of the Haygarths who carried on business therein was one Jonathan, whose son Matthew was the father of that Reverend John Haygarth, lately deceased, intestate. You will thus perceive that the letters I sent you are of much importance, as they relate solely to this Matthew, father of our intestate.

My next inquiries related to the Judson family, who are, it appears, descended from the issue of a certain Ruth Haygarth's marriage with one Peter Judson. This Ruth Haygarth was the only sister of the Matthew alluded to in the letters, and therefore was aunt of the intestate. It would herefrom appear that in this Judson family we must naturally look for the rightful claimant to the fortune of the deceased John Haygarth.

Possessed of this conviction, I proceeded to interrogate my landlord very cautiously as to the

status, &c. of the Judson family, and amongst other questions, asked him, with a complete assumption of indifference, whether he had ever heard that the Judsons expected to inherit property from any branch of the Haygarth family.

This careless interrogatory produced information of, as I imagine, a very valuable character. A certain Theodore Judson, attorney of this town, calls himself heir-at-law to the Haygarth estates; but before he can establish his claim, this Theodore must produce evidence of the demise, without heirs, of one Peter Judson, eldest surviving grandson of Ruth Haygarth's eldest son, a scamp and ne'er-do-weel—if living, supposed to be somewhere in India, where he went as supercargo to a merchant-vessel about the year '41—who stands prior to Theodore Judson in the succession. I conclude that the said Theodore, who, as a lawyer, is likely to do things *secundum artem*, is doing his *possible* to obtain the necessary evidence; but in the mean time he is at a dead-lock, and the whole affair appears to be in a charming condition for speculative interference. I opine, there-

fore, that your brother really has hit upon a good thing this time; and my only wonder is, that instead of allowing his agent, Hawkehurst, to waste his time hunting up old letters of Matthew Haygarth's (to all appearance valueless as documentary evidence), he does not send Valentine to India to hunt for Peter Judson, who, if living, is the rightful heir to the intestate's fortune, and who, as a reckless extravagant fellow, would be likely to make very liberal terms with anyone who offered to procure him a large lump of money.

I confess that I am quite at a loss to understand why your brother George does not take this very obvious course, and why Valentine potters about in this neighbourhood, when a gold-mine is waiting to be *exploité* on the other side.

I shall be very glad to have your views upon this subject; for at the present moment I am fain to acknowledge that I do not see my way to taking any further steps in this business, unless by commencing a search for the missing Peter.

I am, my dear sir, very truly yours,

H. N. C. Paget.

Philip Sheldon to Horatio Paget.

Bayswater, Oct. 10, 186–.

DEAR PAGET,—When so old a stager as G. S. does not take the obvious course, the inference is that there is a better course to be taken—*not* obvious to the uninitiated.

You have done very well so far, but the information you have obtained from your landlord is only such information as anyone else may obtain from the current gossip of Ullerton. You haven't yet got to the *dessous des cartes*. Remember what I told you in London. G. S. *has* the clue to this labyrinth; and what you have to do is to hold on to the coat-tails (in a figurative sense) of his agent, V. H.

Don't put your trust in prosy old landlords; but continue to set a watch upon that young man, and follow up his trail as you did in the matter of the letters.

If the Peter Judson who went to India three-and-twenty years ago were the right man to follow, G. S. would scarcely give twenty pounds for the letters of Mrs. Matthew Haygarth. It

appears to me that G. must be looking for an heir on the Haygarth side of the house; and if so, rely upon it he has his reasons. Don't bewilder yourself by trying to theorise, but get to the bottom of G.'s theory.

Yours truly, P. S.

Horatio Paget to Philip Sheldon.

Royal Hotel, Oct. 12, 186–.

My dear Sir,—Considering the advice contained in your last very good, I lost no time in acting upon it. I need hardly tell you that to employ the services of a hired spy, and to degrade myself in some sort to the level of a private inquirer, was somewhat revolting to a man who, in the decadence of his fortunes, has ever striven to place some limit on the outrages which that hard taskmaster, poverty, may have from time to time compelled him to inflict upon his self-respect. But in the furtherance of a cause which I conclude is in no manner dishonourable, since an unclaimed heritage must needs be a prize open to all, I submitted to this temporary degradation

of my higher feelings; and I trust that when the time arrives for the settlement of any pecuniary consideration which I am to derive from these irksome and uncongenial labours, my wounded self-respect may not be omitted from the reckoning.

The above exordium may appear to you tedious; but it is only just to myself to remind you that you are not dealing with a vulgar hireling.

My first step, after duly meditating your suggestions, was to find a fitting watch for the movements of Hawkehurst. I opined that the best person to play the spy would be that class of man whose existence seems for the most part devoted to the lounging at street-corners, the chewing of straw, and that desultory kind of industry known in the *patois* of this race as 'fetching errands.' This is the man, or boy, who starts up from the pavement (as through a trap-door in the flags) whenever one alights from or would enter any kind of vehicle. Unbidden, unrequired, and obnoxious, the creature arises, and opens a door, or lays some rag of his wretched attire on a muddy wheel, and then whines, piteous, for a copper.

Such a man, or such a boy, I felt convinced must exist among the hangers-on of the Royal Hotel: nor was I mistaken. On inquiring for a handy lad, capable of attending upon my needs at all hours in the day, and not a servant in the hotel, but a person who would be wholly at my own disposal, I was informed that the Boots had a younger brother who was skilled in the fetching of errands, and who would be happy to wait upon me for a very reasonable remuneration; or, in the words of the waiter himself, would be ready to leave it—*i. e.* the remuneration—to my own generosity. I know that there are no people who expect so much as those who leave the assessment of their claims to your own generosity; but as I wanted good service, I was prepared to pay well.

The younger Boots made his appearance in due course—a sharp young fellow enough; and I forthwith made him my slave by the promise of five shillings a day for every day in which I should require his services. I then told him that it was my misfortune to own—with a strong inclination to disown—a reprobate nephew, now an inhabitant

of that very town. This nephew, I had reason to believe, was going at a very rapid rate to the dogs; but my affectionate feelings would not allow him to consummate his own destruction without one last effort to reclaim him. I had therefore followed him to Ullerton, whither I believed him to be led by the worst possible motives; and having done so, my next business was to keep myself informed of his whereabouts.

Seeing that the younger Boots accepted these statements with unquestioning faith, I went on to inquire whether he felt himself equal to the delicate duty of hanging about the yard of the Black Swan, and watching the doors of exit from that hotel, with a view to following my recreant nephew wherever he might go, even if considerably beyond the limits of Ullerton. I saw that the lad's intelligence was likely to be equal to this transaction, unless there should arise any difficult or complicated position by reason of the suspicion of Hawkehurst, or other mischance. "Do you think you can watch the gentleman without being observed?" I asked. "I'm pretty

well sure I can, sir," answered the boy, who is of an enterprising, and indeed audacious, temper. "Very well," said I; "you will go to the Black Swan Inn. Hawkehurst is the name by which my nephew is known there, and it will be your duty to find him out." I gave the boy a minute account of Valentine's appearance, and other instructions with which I need not trouble you. I further furnished him with money, so that he might be able to follow Hawkehurst by rail, or any other mode of conveyance, if necessary; and then despatched him, with an order to come back to me when he had seen our man safely lodged in the Black Swan after his day's perambulations. "And if he shouldn't go out at all?" suggested the lad. "In that case you must stick to your post till nightfall, and pick up all the information you can about my unfortunate nephew from the hangers-on of the hotel," said I. "I suppose you know someone at the Black Swan?" The boy informed me, in his untutored language, that he knew "a'most all of 'em," and thereupon departed.

At nine o'clock at night he again appeared before me, big with the importance of his day's work. He had seen my nephew issue forth from the Black Swan within an hour of leaving my presence, and had followed him, first to Mr. William Judson's, in Ferrygate, where he waited and hung about nearly an hour, keeping himself well out of view round the corner of Chalkin-street, a turning close to Mr. Judson's house. After leaving this gentleman's house, my renegade nephew had proceeded — carrying a letter in his hand, and walking as if in very good spirits (but that fellow Hawkehurst would walk to the gallows in good spirits)—to the Lancaster-road, where he was admitted into Lochiel Villa, a house belonging, as my Mercury ascertained from a passing baker's boy, to Miss Judson, sister of the William Judson of Ferrygate. You will perceive that this town appears to teem with the Judson family. My messenger, with praiseworthy art, contrived to engage in a game of tip-cat (what, I wonder, *is* a tip-cat?) with some vagrant boys disporting themselves in the roadway, within view of Miss Jud-

son's house. Hence, after the lapse of more than an hour, Boots-Mercury beheld my recreant relative emerge, and from this point followed him—always with extreme caution—back to the Black Swan. Here he hung about the yard, favoured by his close acquaintance with the ostler, until eight o'clock in the evening, no event of the smallest importance occurring during all those hours. But at eight there arrived a young woman with a packet from Miss Judson to Mr. Hawkehurst. The packet was small, and was sealed with red wax. This was all my Mercury could ascertain respecting it; but this was something.

I at once divined that this packet must needs contain letters. I asked myself whether those letters or papers had been sold to Hawkehurst, or only lent to him, and I immediately concluded that they could only have been lent. It was all very well for Goodge, the Methodist parson, to traffic in the epistles of Mrs. Matthew Haygarth, but it was to the last degree unlikely that a well-to-do maiden lady would part with family letters or papers for any pecuniary consideration

whatever. "No," I said to myself, "the documents have been lent, and will have to be returned;" and thereupon I laid my plans for the next day's campaign, with a view to obtaining a peep at those letters, by fair means or foul. I told the boy to be at his post in the inn-yard early the next morning; and if my nephew did not leave the inn, my agent was to ascertain what he was doing, and to bring me word thereof. "I'll tell you what it is, Boots," I said; "I have reason to believe that sadly-disposed nephew of mine has some wicked intention with regard to Miss Judson, who is nearly related to a young lady with whom that unprincipled young man is, or pretends to be, in love; and I very much fear that he means to send her some letters, written by this foolish niece of hers to my more foolish nephew, and eminently calculated to wound the good lady's feelings. Now, in order to prevent this very shameful conduct on his part, I want to intercept any packet or letter which that mistaken youth may send to Miss Judson. Do you feel yourself capable of getting hold of such a packet, on consideration of a bonus of

half-a-sovereign in addition to the five shillings per diem already agreed upon?"

This, in more direct and vulgar phraseology, was what I said to the boy; and the boy departed, after pledging himself to bring me any packet which Hawkehurst might despatch from the Swan Inn. The only fear was that Hawkehurst might carry the packet himself, and this contingency appeared unpleasantly probable.

Fortune favoured us. My reprobate nephew was too ill to go out. He intrusted Miss Judson's packet to the waiter, the waiter confided it to the Boots, the Boots resigned his responsibility in favour of my boy Mercury, who kindly offered to save that functionary the trouble of a walk to the Lancaster-road.

At eleven A.M. the packet was in my hands. I have devoted the best part of to-day to the contents of this packet. They consist of letters written by Matthew Haygarth, and distinguished by a most abominable orthography; but I remember my own father's epistolary composition to have been somewhat deficient in this respect; nor is it

singular that the humble citizen should have been a poor hand at spelling in an age when royal personages indulged in a phonetic style of orthography which would provoke the laughter of a modern charity-boy. That the pretender to the crown of England should murder the two languages in which he wrote seems a small thing; but that Frederick the Great, the most accomplished of princes, bosom-friend of Voltaire, and sworn patron of the *literati*, should not have been able to spell, is a matter for some astonishment. I could but remember this fact, as I perused the epistles of Matthew Haygarth.

I felt that these letters had in all probability been carefully numbered by the lady to whom they belong, and that to tamper with them to any serious extent might be dangerous. I have therefore only ventured to retain one insignificant scrawl as an example of Matthew Haygarth's caligraphy and signature. From the rest I have taken copious notes. It appears to me that these letters relate to some *liaison* of the gentleman's youth; though I am fain to confess

myself surprised to discover that, even in a period notorious for looseness of morals, a man should enter into such details in a correspondence with his sister. *Autres temps, autres mœurs.* I have selected my extracts with great care, and hope that you may be able to make more use of them than I can at present imagine possible. I shall post this letter and enclosure with my own hands, though in order to do so I must pass the Black Swan. I shall despatch my messenger to Lochiel Villa, with Miss Judson's packet, under cover of the darkness.

In much haste, to catch the London mail,

Truly yours,

H. N. C. P.

From Philip Sheldon to Horatio Paget.

City, Oct. 12, 186–.

Dear Paget,—Come back to town. You are only wasting money, time, and trouble.

Yours,

P. S.

CHAPTER III.

TOO CLEVER FOR A CATSPAW.

Captain Paget returned to town, mystified by that sudden summons from his patron, and eager to know what new aspect of affairs rendered his further presence in Ullerton useless or undesirable.

Horatio arrived in the great city half a dozen hours before his sometime protégé, and was comfortably installed when Valentine returned to those lodgings in Omega-street, Chelsea, which the two men occupied in common.

Captain Paget went into the city to see Philip Sheldon on the day of his return, but did not succeed in finding the stockbroker. The evening's post brought him a letter from Philip, appointing an interview at Bayswater, at three o'clock on the following day—the day after Valentine's return from Ullerton.

Punctual to the moment appointed by this letter, Captain Paget appeared at the Lawn on the following day. He was ushered into Mr. Sheldon's study, where he found that gentleman awaiting him, grave and meditative of mood, but friendly, and indeed cordial, in his manner to the returning traveller.

"My dear Paget, sit down; I am delighted to see you. Your trip has made you look five years younger, by Jove! I was sorry to find you had called while I was out, and had waited for me upwards of an hour yesterday. I have a good deal of worry on my shoulders, just now; commerce is all worry, you know. The Marquis of Lambeth has come into the market and bought up two-thirds of the Astrakhan Grand Trunk debenture bonds, just as our house had speculated for the fall. And since it has got wind that the Marquis is sweet upon the concern, the bonds are going up like a skyrocket. Such is life. I thought we had better have our little talk here: it's quieter than in the City. Have some sherry and soda; you like that Manzanilla of mine, I know."

And the hospitable Philip rang the bell, without thinking it necessary to wait for his guest's answer.

There was a cordiality, a conciliating friendliness about the stockbroker's manner which Horatio Paget did not like.

"He's too civil by half," the Captain said to himself; "he means to do me."

"And now about this Ullerton business," Mr. Sheldon began, when the wine and soda-water had been brought, and a tall tumbler of that refreshing compound filled for the Captain; "you have really managed matters admirably. I cannot too much applaud your diplomatic tact. You would have put a what's-his-name—that fellow of Napoleon's—to the blush by your management of the whole business. But, unfortunately, when it's all done, it comes to nothing; the whole affair is evidently, from beginning to end, a mare's-nest. It is one of those wild geese which my brother George has been chasing for the last ten years, and which never have resulted in profit to him or anybody else; and I should be something worse

than a fool if I were to lend myself any longer to such a folly."

"Humph," muttered the Captain, "here is a change indeed!"

"Well, yes," Mr. Sheldon answered coolly. "I daresay my conduct does seem rather capricious; but you see George put me out of temper the other day, and I was determined, if he had got a good thing, to cut the ground from under his feet. All your communications from Ullerton tend to show me that he has *not* got hold of a good thing, and that, in any attempt to circumvent him, I should only be circumventing myself, wasting your time, and my own money. This Judson family seems numberless, and it is evident to me that the Reverend John Haygarth's fortune will be a bone of contention amongst the Judsons in the High Court of Chancery for any indefinite number of years between this and the millennium. So I really think, my dear Paget, we'd better consider this transaction finished. I will give you whatever honorarium you think fit to name for your trouble, and we'll close the

affair. I shall find plenty more business, as good, or better, for you to do."

"You are very good," replied the Captain, in nowise satisfied by this promise. It was all too smooth, too conciliatory. And there was a suddenness in this change of plan that was altogether mysterious. So indeed might a capricious man be expected to drop a speculation he had been eager to inaugurate, but Philip Sheldon was the last of men to be suspected of caprice.

"You must have taken an immense deal of trouble with those extracts, now," said the stockbroker carelessly, as Horatio rose to depart, offended and angry, but anxious to conceal his anger. "What, are you off so soon? I thought you would stop and take a chop with us."

"No, thanks; I have an engagement elsewhere. Yes, I took an inordinate trouble with those extracts, and I am sorry to think they should be useless."

"Well, yes, it is rather provoking to you, I daresay. The extracts would be very interesting

from a social point of view, no doubt, to people who care about such things; but in a legal sense they are waste-paper. I can't understand why Hawkehurst was in Ullerton; for, as you yourself suggested, that Peter Judson who went to India must be *the* Judson wanted for this case."

"Your brother may be in league with some other branch of the Judson family. Or what if he is hunting for an heir on the Haygarth side?" asked the Captain, with a very close watch upon Mr. Sheldon's face. Let the stockbroker be never so skilful a navigator of the high-seas of life, there was no undercurrent, no cross trade-wind, no unexplained veering of the magnetic needle to the west, in the mysteries whereof the Captain was not also versed. When Columbus wanted to keep his sailors quiet on that wondrous voyage over an unknown ocean to the Western world, the diplomatic admiral made so bold as to underrate the length of each day's sail in an unveracious log, which he kept for the inspection of his crew; but no doctoring of the social log-book could mislead the acute Horatio.

"How about the Haygarth side of the house?" he asked again; for it had seemed to him that at his first mention of the name of Haygarth, Mr. Sheldon had winced, ever so little. This time, however, he betrayed not the faintest concern; but he was, doubtless, now on his guard.

"Well, I don't see how there can be any claimant on that side of the house," he said carelessly. "You see, according to your old landlord's statement—which I take to be correct—Jonathan Haygarth had but one son, a certain Matthew, who married one, Rebecca So-and-so, and had, in his turn, one only son, the intestate John. Now, in that case, where is your heir to come from, except through Matthew's sister Ruth, who married Peter Judson?"

"Isn't it just possible that Matthew Haygarth may have married twice, and had other children? Those letters certainly suggest the idea of a secret alliance of some kind on Haygarth's part, and the existence of a family, to whom he appears to have been warmly attached. My first idea of this affair was that it must have been a low *liaison;* but

I could hardly realise the fact of Matthew's confiding in his sister, under any such circumstances, however lax in his morals that gentleman may have been. Mrs. Matthew Haygarth's letters hint at some mystery in her husband's life. Is it not likely that this hidden family was a legitimate one?"

"I can't quite see my way to that idea," Mr. Sheldon answered in a meditative tone. "It seems very unlikely that any marriage of Haygarth's could have remained unknown to his townsmen; and even if it were so, I doubt the possibility of our tracing the heirs from such a marriage. No, my dear Paget, I have resolved to wash my hands of the business, and leave my brother George in undisturbed possession of his ground."

"In that case, perhaps you will return my notes; they are interesting to me."

Here again the faintest indication of annoyance in the stockbroker's face told its tale to Captain Paget. For your accomplished navigator of the unknown seas there is no ocean-

bird, no floating weed, that has not a language and a significance.

"You can have your notes, if you want them," answered Mr. Sheldon; "they are at my office. I'll hunt them up and send them to you; or you had better look in upon me in the City early next week, and I can give you a cheque at the same time."

"Thanks. I will be sure and do so."

"You say the orthography of the original letters was queer. I suppose your copies were faithful in all matters except the orthography. And in the names, you of course adhered to the original spelling?"

"Most decidedly," replied Captain Paget, opening the door to depart, and with a somewhat cynical smile upon his face, which was hidden from Mr. Sheldon.

"I suppose there is no doubt of your accuracy with regard to the name of Meynell, now?"

"Not the least. Good afternoon! Ah, there's our young friend Hawkehurst!" exclaimed the Captain, in his "society" voice, as he looked out

into the hall, where Valentine was parting with Diana.

He came and greeted his young friend, and they left the house together.

This was the occasion upon which Valentine was startled by hearing the name 'Meynell' pronounced by the lips of Philip Sheldon.

CHAPTER IV.

CAPTAIN PAGET IS PATERNAL.

Horatio Paget left the Lawn after the foregoing interview, fully convinced that Mr. Sheldon was only desirous to throw him off the scent, in order to follow up the chase alone, for his sole profit and advantage.

"My last letter conveyed some intelligence that altered his whole plan of action," thought the Captain; "that is perfectly clear. He was somewhat wanting in tact when he recalled me so suddenly. But I suppose he thought it would be easy to throw dust in my poor old eyes. What was the intelligence that made him change his mind? That is the grand question."

Captain Paget dined alone at a West-end restaurant that evening. He dined well, for he had in hand certain moneys advanced by his

patron, and he was not disposed to be parsimonious. He sat for some time in meditative mood over his pint bottle of Chambertin, and the subject of his meditation was Philip Sheldon.

"Yes," he murmured at last, "that is it. The charm is in the name of Meynell. Why else should he question me about the orthography of that name? I sent him information about Matthew Haygarth in the wife's letters, and he took no special notice of that information. It was only when the name of Meynell cropped up that he changed his tactics and tried to throw me over. It seems to me that he must have some knowledge of this Meynell branch, and therefore thinks himself strong enough to act alone, and to throw me over the bridge. To throw me over," the Captain repeated to himself slowly. "Well, we'll see about that. We'll see; yes, we'll see."

At noon on the following day Captain Paget presented himself again at the Bayswater villa, where his daughter ate the bread of dependence. He appeared this time in a purely paternal cha-

racter. He came to call upon his only child. Before paying this visit the Captain had improved the shining hour by a careful study of the current and two or three back volumes of the Post Office and Trade Directories; but all his researches in those interesting volumes had failed to reveal to him the existence of any metropolitan Meynells.

"The Meynells whom Sheldon knows may be in the heart of the country," he said to himself, after these futile labours.

It was a fine autumnal morning, and as Miss Paget was at home and disengaged, her affectionate father suggested that she should take a walk with him in Kensington Gardens. Such a promenade had very little attraction for the young lady; but she had a vague idea that she owed a kind of duty to her father not remitted by his neglect of all duties to her; so she assented with a smile, and went out with him, looking very handsome and stylish in her simple but fashionable attire, no part of which had been provided by the parent she accompanied.

The Captain surveyed her with some sense of family pride.

"Upon my word, my dear, you do me credit!" he exclaimed with a somewhat patronising kindness of tone and manner; "indeed, any man might be proud of such a daughter. You are every inch a Paget."

"I hope not, papa," said the girl involuntarily; but the Captain's more delicate instincts had been considerably blunted in the press and jostle of life, and he did not feel the sting of this remark.

"Well, perhaps you are right, my love," he replied blandly; "the Pagets *are* an unlucky family. Like those Grecian people, the Atri—, what's-his-name—the man who was killed in his bath, you know. His wife, or the other young person who had come to visit his daughters, made the water too hot, you know—and that kind of thing. I am not quite clear about the story, but it's one of those farragos of rubbish they make young men learn at public schools. Yes, my dear, I really am amazingly pleased by your

improved appearance. Those Sheldon people dress you very nicely; and I consider your residence in that family a very agreeable arrangement for all parties. You confer a favour on the girl by your society, and so on, and the mother provides you with a comfortable home. All I wonder is that your good looks haven't made their mark before this with some of Sheldon's rich stock-broking fellows."

"We see very little of the stockbroking fellows, as you call them, at the Lawn, papa."

"Indeed! I thought Sheldon kept a great deal of company."

"O no. He gives a dinner now and then, a gentleman's dinner usually; and poor Mrs. Sheldon is very anxious that it should all go off well, as she says; but I don't think he is a person who cares much for society."

"Really, now?"

"His mind seems completely occupied by his business, you see, papa. That horrible pursuit of gain seems to require all his thoughts, all his time. He is always reading commercial papers,

the 'Money Market,' and 'On Change,' and the 'Stockbroker's Vade-Mecum,' and publications of that kind. When he is not reading, he is thinking; and by his manner one would fancy his thoughts were always gloomy and unpleasant. What a miserable, hateful, unholy life to lead! I would not be that man for all the money in the Bank of England. But it is a kind of treachery to tell these things. Mr. Sheldon is very good to me. He lets me sit at his table and share the comforts of his home, and I must be very ungrateful to speak against him. I do *not* mean to speak against him, you see, papa—I only mean that a life devoted to money-making is in itself hateful."

"My dear child, you may be assured that anything you say to *me* will go no further," said the Captain with dignity; "and in whom should you confide, if not in your father? I have a profound respect for Sheldon and his family—yes, my love, a profound respect; and I think that girl Sarah—no, I mean Charlotte—a very charming young person. I need scarcely tell you that

the smallest details of your life in that family possess a keen interest for me. I am not without a father's feelings, Diana, though circumstances have never permitted me to perform a father's duties."

And here the solitary tear which the accomplished Horatio could produce at will trembled in his eye. This one tear was always at his command. For the life of him he could not have produced a second; but the single drop never failed him, and he found one tear as effective as a dozen, in giving point and finish to a pathetic speech.

Diana looked at him, and wondered, and doubted. Alas, she knew him only too well! Any other creature in this wide world he might deceive, but not her. She had lived with him; she had tasted the bitterness of dependence upon him,—ten times more bitter than dependence on strangers. She had shown him her threadbare garments day after day, and had pleaded for a little money, to be put off with a lying excuse. She could not forget this. She

had forgiven him long ago, being of too generous a nature to brood upon past injuries. But she could not forget what manner of man he was, and thank him for pretty speeches which she knew to be meaningless.

They talked a little more of Mr. Sheldon and his family, but Diana did not again permit herself to be betrayed into any vehement expression of her opinions. She answered all her father's questions without restraint, for they were very commonplace questions, of a kind that might be answered without any breach of faith.

"Amongst the Sheldons' acquaintances did you ever hear of any people called Meynell?" Captain Paget asked at length.

"Yes," Diana replied, after a moment's thought, "the name is certainly very familiar to me;" and then, after a pause, she exclaimed, "Why the Meynells were relations of Charlotte's! Yes, her grandmother was a Miss Meynell; I perfectly remember hearing Mrs. Sheldon talk about the Meynells. But I do not think there are any descendants of that family now living. Why

do you ask the question, papa? What interest have you in the Meynells?"

"Well, my dear, I have my reasons, but they in no manner concern Mr. Sheldon or his family; and I must beg you to be careful not to mention the subject in your conversation with those worthy people. I want to know all about this Meynell family. I have come across some people of that name, and I want to ascertain the precise relationship existing between these people and the Sheldons. But the Sheldons must know nothing of this inquiry for the present. The people I speak of are poor and proud, and they would perish rather than press a relationship upon a rich man, unless fully justified by the closeness of family ties. I am sure you understand all this, Diana?"

"Not very clearly, papa."

"Well, my dear, it is a delicate position, and perhaps somewhat difficult for the comprehension of a third party. All you need understand is the one fact that any information respecting the Meynell family will be vitally interesting to my friends, and, through them, serviceable to me. There is,

in fact, a legacy which these friends of mine could claim, under a certain will, if once assured as to the degree of their relationship to your friend Charlotte's kindred on the Meynell side of the house. To give them the means of securing this legacy would be to help the ends of justice; and I am sure, Diana, you would wish to do that."

"Of course, papa, if I can do so without any breach of faith with my employers. Can you promise me that no harm will result to the Sheldons, above all to Charlotte Halliday, from any information I may procure for you respecting the Meynell family?"

"Certainly, Diana, I can promise you that. I repeat most solemnly, that, by obtaining such information for me, you will be aiding the cause of justice."

If Horatio Paget might ever be betrayed into the inconsistency of a truthful assertion, it seemed to his daughter that it was likely to be in this moment. His words sounded like truth; and on reflection, Diana failed to perceive that she could by any possibility inflict

wrong on her friends by obliging her father in this small affair.

"Let me think the matter over, papa," she said.

"Nonsense, Diana; what thinking over can be wanted about such a trifle? I never before asked you a favour. Surely you cannot refuse to grant so simple a request, after the trouble I have taken to explain my reasons for making it."

There was some further discussion, which ended in Miss Paget consenting to oblige her father.

"And you will manage matters with tact?" urged the Captain at parting.

"There is no especial tact required, papa," replied Diana; "the matter is easy enough. Mrs. Sheldon is very fond of talking about her own affairs. I have only to ask her some leading question about the Meynells, and she will run on for an hour, telling me the minutest details of family history connected with them. I daresay I have heard the whole story before, and have not heeded

it: I often find my thoughts wandering when Mrs. Sheldon is talking."

Three days after this, Captain Paget called on Mr. Sheldon in the City, when he received a very handsome recompense for his labours at Ullerton, and became repossessed of the extracts he had made from Matthew Haygarth's letters, but not of the same Mr. Haygarth's autograph letter: that document Mr. Sheldon confessed to having mislaid.

"He has mislaid the original letter, and he has had ample leisure for copying my extracts; and he thinks I am such a consummate fool as not to see all that," thought Horatio, as he left the stockbroker's office, enriched, but not satisfied.

In the course of the same day he received a long letter from Diana, containing the whole history of the Meynells, as known to Mrs. Sheldon. Once set talking, Georgy had told all she could tell, delighted to find herself listened to with obvious interest by her companion.

"I trust that you have not deceived me, my dear father," Diana concluded, after setting forth the Meynell history. "The dear good soul was so candid and confiding, and seemed so pleased by the interest I showed in her family affairs, that I should feel myself the vilest of wretches if any harm could result to her, or those she loves, from the information thus obtained."

The information was very complete. Mrs. Sheldon had a kindly and amiable nature, but she was not one of those sensitive souls who instinctively shrink from a story of bitter shame or profound sorrow, as from a cureless wound. She told Diana, with many lamentations, and much second-hand morality, the sad history of Susan Meynell's elopement, and of the return, fourteen years afterwards, of the weary wanderer. Even the poor little trunk, with the name of the Rouen trunk-maker, Mrs. Sheldon dwelt upon with graphic insistance. A certain womanly delicacy had prevented her ever telling this story in the presence of her brother-in-law, George Sheldon, whose hard worldly manner in no way invited any sentimental

revelation. Thus it happened that George had never heard the name of Meynell in connection with his friend Tom Halliday's family, or had heard it so seldom as to have entirely forgotten it. To Horatio his daughter's letter was priceless. It placed him at once in as good a position as Philip Sheldon, or as George Sheldon and his coadjutor, Valentine Hawkehurst. There were thus three different interests involved in the inheritance of the Reverend John Haygarth.

Captain Paget sat late by a comfortable fire, in his own bedchamber, that night, enjoying an excellent cigar, and meditating the following jottings from a pedigree:

CHARLOTTE MEYNELL, married JAMES HALLIDAY.
|
THOMAS HALLIDAY, only son of above, married GEORGINA, now Mrs. SHELDON; had issue,
|
CHARLOTTE HALLIDAY.

SUSAN MEYNELL, only and elder sister of the above-named Charlotte, ran away from her home, in Yorkshire, with a Mr. Kingdon, brother to Lord Durnsville. Fate unknown during fourteen years of her life. Died in London, 1835. Buried under her maiden name; but no positive evidence to show that she was unmarried.

CHAPTER V.

THE CAPTAIN'S COADJUTOR.

Once in possession of the connexion between the intestate John Haygarth and the Halliday family, Captain Paget's course was an easy one. He understood now why his investigations had been so suddenly brought to a standstill. Philip Sheldon had discovered the unexpected connection, and was eager to put a stop to researches that might lead to a like discovery on the part of his coadjutor.

"And Sheldon expects to prove his stepdaughter's claim to this fortune?" thought the Captain. "He will affect ignorance of the whole transaction until his plans are ripe, and then spring them suddenly upon his brother George. I wonder if there is anything to be made out of George by letting him into the secret of his

brother's interference? No; I think not. George is as poor as a church mouse; and Philip must always be the more profitable acquaintance."

On the broad basis afforded by Diana's letter, Captain Paget was able to build up the whole scheme of the Haygarthian succession. The pedigree of the Meynells was sufficiently simple, if their legitimate descent from Matthew Haygarth could be fairly proved. Charlotte Halliday was heiress-at-law to the fortune of John Haygarth, always provided that her great-aunt Susan died without legitimate issue.

Here was the one chance which appeared to the adventurous mind of Horatio Paget worth some trouble in the way of research. Fourteen years of Susan Meynell's life had been spent away from all who knew her. It was certainly possible that in that time she might have formed some legitimate alliance.

This was the problem which Horatio set himself to solve. Your adventurer is, of all manner of men, the most sanguine. Sir Walter Raleigh sees visions of gold and glory where grave states-

men see only a fool's-paradise of dreams and fancies. To the hopeful mind of the Captain these fourteen unrecorded years of Susan Meynell's life seemed a very Golconda.

He did not, however, rest satisfied with the information afforded by Diana's letter.

"I will have the story of these Meynells at first-hand as well as at second-hand," he said to himself; and he lost no time in presenting himself again at the Villa—this time as a visitor to Mrs. Sheldon.

With Georgy he had been always a favourite. His little stories of the great world,—the Prince and Perdita, Brummel and Sheridan,—though by no means novel to those acquainted with that glorious period of British history, were very agreeable to Georgy. The Captain's florid flatteries pleased her; and she contrasted the ceremonious manners of that gentleman with the curt, business-like style of her husband, very much to the Captain's advantage. He came to thank her for her goodness to his child, and this occasion gave him ample opportunity for sentiment. He had

asked to see Mrs. Sheldon alone, as his daughter's presence would have been some hindrance to the carrying out of his design.

"There are things I have to say which I should scarcely care to utter before my daughter, you see, my dear Mrs. Sheldon," he said, with pathetic earnestness. "I should not wish to remind the dear child of her desolate position; and I need scarcely tell you that position is *very* desolate. A father who, at his best, cannot provide a fitting home for a delicately-nurtured girl, and who at any moment may be snatched away, is but a poor protector. And were it not for your friendship, I know not what my child's fate might be. The dangers and temptations that beset a handsome young woman are very terrible, my dear Mrs. Sheldon."

This was intended to lead up to the subject of Susan Meynell; but Georgy did not rise to the bait. She only shook her head plaintively in assent to the Captain's proposition.

"Yes, madam; beauty unallied with strength of mind and high principles, is apt to be a fatal

dower. In every family there are sad histories," murmured the sentimental Horatio.

Even this remark did not produce the required result; so the Captain drew upon his invention for a specimen history from the annals of his own house, which was a colourable imitation of Susan Meynell's story.

"And what was the end of this lovely Belinda Paget's career, my dear Mrs. Sheldon?" he concluded. "The gentleman was a man of high rank, but a scoundrel and a dastard. Sophia's brother, a cornet in the First Life-Guards, called him out, and there was a meeting on Wimbledon-common, in which Lavinia's seducer was mortally wounded. There was a trial, and the young captain of hussars, Amelia's brother, was sentenced to transportation for life. I need scarcely tell you that the sentence was never carried out. The young man fell gloriously at Waterloo, at the head of his own regiment, the Scotch Fusiliers, and Lavinia—I beg pardon, Amelia; nay, what am I saying, the girl's name was Belinda—embraced the Roman Catholic faith, and expired

from the effects of stigmata inflicted by her own hands in a paroxysm of remorse for her brother's untimely death at the hands of her seducer."

This lively little impromptu sketch had the desired effect. Melted by the woes of Belinda, or Sophia, or Amelia, or Lavinia Paget, Mrs. Sheldon was moved to relate a sad event in her husband's family; and encouraged by the almost tearful sympathy of the Captain, she again repeated every detail of Susan Meynell's life, as known to her kindred. And as this recital had flowed spontaneously from the good soul's lips, she would be scarcely likely to allude to it afterwards in conversation with Mr. Sheldon; more especially as that gentleman was not in the habit of wasting much of his valuable time in small-talk with the members of his own household.

Captain Paget had duly calculated this, and every other hazard that menaced the intricate path he had mapped out for himself.

Satisfied by Mrs. Sheldon's repetition of Susan Meynell's story, and possessed of all the information he could hope to obtain from that quarter,

Horatio set himself to consider what steps must next be taken. Much serious reflection convinced even his sanguine mind that the enterprise was a difficult one, and could scarcely be carried through successfully without help from some skilled genealogist.

"George Sheldon has given his lifetime to this sort of thing, and is a skilled lawyer to boot," Captain Paget said to himself. "If I hope to go in against him, I must have someone at my elbow as well versed in this sort of business as he is."

Having once admitted this necessity, the Captain set himself to consider where he was to find the right person. A very brief meditation settled this question. One among the numerous business transactions of Captain Paget's life had brought him in contact with a very respectable little French gentleman called Fleurus, who had begun his career as a notary; but finding that profession unprofitable, had become a hunter of pedigrees, and heirs-at-law—for the most part to insignificant legacies—unclaimed stock, and all

other jetsam and flotsam thrown up on the shadowy shores of the Court of Chancery. M. Fleurus had not often been so fortunate as to put his industrious fingers into any large pie, but he had contrived to make a good deal of money out of small affairs, and had found his clients grateful.

"The man of men," thought Horatio Paget; and he betook himself to the office of M. Fleurus early next day, provided with all documents relating to the Haygarthian succession.

His interview with the little Frenchman was long and satisfactory. On certain conditions as to future reward, said reward to be contingent on success, M. Fleurus was ready to devote himself heart and soul to the interests of Captain Paget.

"To begin: we must find legal evidence of this Matthew Haygarth's marriage to the mother of this child C., who came afterwards to marry the man Meynell; and after we will go to Susan Meynell. Her box came from Rouen—that we know. Where her box came from she is likely to have come from. So it is at Rouen, or near

Rouen, we must look for her. Let me see: she die in 1835! That is long time. To look for the particulars of her life is like to dive into the ocean for to find the lost cargo of a ship that has gone down to the bottom, no one knows where. But to a man really expert in these things there is nothing of impossible. I will find you your Susan Meynell in less than six months; the evidence of her marriage, if she was married; her children, if she had children."

In less than six months—the margin seemed a wide one to the impatient Horatio. But he knew that such an investigation must needs be slow, and he left matters in the hands of his new ally with a sense that he had done the best thing that could be done. Then followed for Horatio Paget two months of patient attendance upon fortune. He was not idle during this time; for Mr. Sheldon, who seemed particularly anxious to conciliate him, threw waifs and strays of business into his way. Before the middle of November, M. Fleurus had found the register of Matthew Haygarth's marriage, as George Sheldon had found it before

him, working in the same groove, and with the same order of intelligence. After this important step M. Fleurus departed for his native shores, where he had other business besides the Meynell affair to claim his attention. Meanwhile the astute Horatio kept a close eye upon his young friend Valentine. He knew from Diana that the young man had been in Yorkshire; and he guessed the motive of his visit to Newhall, not for a moment supposing that his presence in that farmhouse could have been accidental. The one turn of affairs that utterly and completely mystified him was Mr. Sheldon's sanction of the engagement between Valentine and Charlotte. This was a mystery for which he could for some time find no solution.

"Sheldon will try to establish his stepdaughter's claim to the fortune; that is clear. But why does he allow her to throw herself away on a penniless adventurer like Hawkehurst? If she were to marry him before recovering the Haygarth estate, she would recover it as his wife, and the fortune would be thrown unprotected into his hands."

More deliberate reflection cast a faint light upon Philip Sheldon's motives for so quixotic a course.

"The girl had fallen in love with Val. It was too late to prevent that. She is of age, and can marry whom she pleases. By showing himself opposed to her engagement with Val, he might have hurried her into rebellion, and an immediate marriage. By affecting to consent to the engagement, he would, on the contrary, gain time, and the advantage of all those chances that are involved in the lapse of time."

Within a few days of Christmas came the following letter from M. Fleurus.

From Jacques Rousseau Fleurus to Horatio Paget.

Hôtel de la Pucelle, place Jeanne d'Arc, Rouen,
21st December 186—.

Monsieur, — After exertions incalculable, — after labours Herculean, I come to learn something of your Susanne Meynell—more, I come to learn of her marriage. But I will begin at the beginning of things. The labours, the time, the ef-

forts, the courage, the patience, the—I will say it without to blush—the genius which this enterprise has cost me, I will not enlarge upon. There are things which cannot tell themselves. To commence, I will tell you how I went to Rouen, how I advertised in the journals of Rouen, and asked among the people of Rouen—at shops, at hotels, by the help of my allies, the police, by means which you, in your inexperience of this science of research, could not even figure to yourself—always seeking the trace of this woman Meynell. It was all pain lost. Of this woman Meynell in Rouen there was no trace.

In the end I enraged myself. "Imbecile!" I said to myself, "why seek in this dull commercial city, among this heavy people, for that which thou shouldst seek only in the centre of all things? As the rivers go to the ocean, so flow all the streams of human life to the one great central ocean of humanity—PARIS! It is there the Alpha and the Omega—there the mighty heart through which the blood of all the body must be pumped, and is pumping always," I say to myself, unconsciously

rising to the sublimity of my great countryman, Hugo—in whose verse I find an echo of my own soul, and whose compositions I flatter myself I could have surpassed, if I had devoted to the Muses the time and the powers which I have squandered on a *vilain métier*, that demands the genius of a Talleyrand, and rewards with the crust of an artisan.

In Paris, then, I will seek the woman Meynell, and to Paris I go. In my place an inexperienced person would advertise in the most considerable papers; would invite Susanne Meynell to hear of something to her advantage; and would bring together a crowd of false Susanne Meynells, greedy to obtain the benefice. Me, I do nothing in this style there. On the contrary, in the most obscure little journals of Paris I publish a modest little advertisement as from the brother of Susanne Meynell, who implores his sister to visit him on his deathbed.

Here are follies, you will say. Since Susanne Meynell is dead it is thirty years, and her brother is dead also. Ah, how you are dull, you insulars,

and how impossible for your foggy island to produce a Fouché, a Canler, a genius of police, a Columbus of the subterranean darknesses of your city.

The brother, dying, advertises for the sister dead; and who will answer that letter, think you? Some good Christian soul who has pity for the sick man, and who will not permit him to languish in waiting the sister who will come to him never. For us of the Roman Catholic religion, the duty of charity is paramount. You of the Anglican faith—bah, how you are cold, how you are hard, how you are unpitiable!

My notice appears once, my notice appears twice, three times, four times, many times. I occupy myself about my other business, and I wait. I do not wait unusefully. In effect, a letter arrives at last at the address of the dying, from a lady who knew Susanne Meynell *before her marriage with M. Lenoble.*

Think you not that to me this was a moment of triumph? *Before her marriage with M. Lenoble.* Those words appear under my eyes in the writing

of the unknown lady. "It is found!" I cry to myself; and then I hasten myself to reply to the unknown lady. Will she permit me to see her?

With all politeness I make the request; with all politeness it is answered. The lady calls herself Mademoiselle Servin. She resides in the street Grande Mademoiselle, at the corner of the Place Lauzun. It is of all the streets of Paris the most miserable. One side is already removed. In face of the windows of those houses that still stand they are making a new Boulevard. Behind, they are pulling down edifices of all kinds in the formation of a new square. At the side there is a yawning chasm between two tall houses, through which they pierce a new street. One sees the interior of many rooms rising one above another for seven storys. Here the gay hangings of an apartment of little master; there the still gaudier decoration of a boudoir of these ladies. High above these luxurious salons—ah, but how much more near to the skies!—one sees the poor gray paper, blackened and smoky, of a garret of sempstress, or workman, and the hearths black,

deserted. These interiors thus exposed tighten me the heart. It is the autopsy of the domestic hearth.

I find the Mademoiselle Servin an old lady, gray and wan. The house where she now resides is the house which she has inhabited five-and-thirty years. They talk of pulling it down, and to her the idea of leaving it is exquisite pain. She is alone, a teacher of music. She has seen proprietors come and go. The *pension* has changed mistresses many times. Students of law and of medicine have come and passed like the shadows of a magic lantern; but this poor soul has remained still in her little room on the fourth, and has kept always her little old piano.

It was here she knew Susanne Meynell, and a young Frenchman, who became in love with her, for she was beautiful like the angels, this lady said to me.

Until we meet for all details. Enough that I come to discover where the marriage took place, that I come to obtain a copy of the register, and that I do all things in rule. Enough that the

marriage is a good marriage—a regular marriage, and that I have placed myself already in communication with the heir of that marriage, who resides within some few leagues of this city.

My labours, my successes, I will not describe. It must that they will be recompensed in the future. I have dispensed much money during these transactions.

Agree, monsieur, that I am your devoted servitor,

JACQUES ROUSSEAU FLEURUS.

It was in consequence of the receipt of this missive that the Captain trusted himself to the winds and waves in the cheerless December weather. He was well pleased to find that M. Fleurus had made discoveries so important; but he had no idea of letting that astute practitioner absorb all the power into his own hands.

"I must see Susan Meynell's heir," he said to himself; "I must give him clearly to understand that to me he owes the discovery of his claims, and that in this affair the Frenchman Fleurus is no more than a paid agent."

Book the Third.

GUSTAVE IN ENGLAND.

CHAPTER I.

HALCYON DAYS.

Once having offered up the fondest desires of her own heart on the shrine of duty, Diana Paget was not a person to repent herself of the pious sacrifice. After that Christmas night on which she had knelt at Charlotte's feet to confess her sad secret, and to resign all claim to the man she had loved so foolishly, so tenderly, with such a romantic and unselfish devotion, Miss Paget put away all thought of the past from her heart and mind. Heart and mind seemed empty and joyless without those loved tenants, though the tenants had been only fair wraiths of dreams that were dead. There was a sense of something missing in her life—a blank, dull calm, which was at first very painful. But for Charlotte's sake she was careful to hide all outward token of despondency, and the foolish grief, put down by so strong a hand, was ere long well-nigh stifled.

Those dark days which succeeded Christmas were a period of halcyon peace for Valentine and Charlotte. The accepted lover came to the Villa when he pleased, but was still careful not to encroach on the license allowed him. Once a week he permitted himself the delight of five-o'clock tea in Mrs. Sheldon's drawing-room, on which occasions he brought Charlotte all the news of his small literary world, and a good deal of useful information out of the books he had been reading. When Mr. Sheldon pleased to invite him to dinner on Sunday, he gladly accepted the invitation, and this Sunday dinner became in due course an established institution.

"You may as well make this your home on a Sunday," said Mr. Sheldon one day, with careless cordiality; "I daresay you find Sunday dull in your lodgings."

"Yes, papa," cried Charlotte, "he does find it very dull—dreadfully dull—don't you, Valentine?"

And she regarded him with that pretty, tender, almost motherly look, which young ladies who

are engaged are apt to bestow on their affianced lovers.

Miss Halliday was very grateful to her step-father for his kindness to her landless adorer, and showed her appreciation of his conduct in many pretty little caressing ways, which would have been infinitely bewitching to a person of sentiment.

Unfortunately, Mr. Sheldon was not sentimental, and any exhibition of feeling appeared to have an irritating effect upon his nerves. There were times when he shrank from some little sudden caress of Charlotte's as from the sting of an adder. Aversion, surprise, fear, what was it that showed in the expression of his face at these moments? Whatever that strange look was, it departed too quickly for analysis; and the stockbroker thanked his stepdaughter for her little affectionate demonstration, with his wonted smile —the smile he smiled on Change, the smile which was sometimes on his lips when his mind was a nest of scorpions.

To Valentine, in these rosy hours, life seemed full of hope and brightness. He transferred his

goods and chattels from Omega-street, Chelsea, to the pleasant lodging in the Edgware-road, where he was nearer Charlotte, and out of the way of his late patron Captain Paget, in the event of that gentleman's return from the Continent.

Fortune favoured him. The gaiety of heart which came with his happiness lent a grace to his pen. Pleasant thoughts and fancies bedecked his pages. He saw everything in the rosy light of love and beauty, and there was a buoyant freshness in all he wrote. The Pegasus might be but a common hackney, but the hack was young and fresh, and galloped gaily as he scented the dewy morning air. It is not every poet whose Pegasus clears at a bound a space as wide as all that waste of land and sea the watchman views from his tall tower on the rock.

Mr. Hawkehurst's papers on Lauzun, Brummel, Sardanapalus, Rabelais, Lord Chesterfield, Erasmus, Beau Nash, Apelles, Galileo, and Philip of Orleans, were in demand, and the reading public wondered at this prodigy of book-making. He had begun to save money, and had opened a deposit account

at the Unitas Bank. How he gloated over the deposit receipts in the stillness of the night, when he added a fresh one to his store! When he had three, for sums amounting in all to forty pounds, he took them to Charlotte, and she looked at them, and he looked at them, as if the poor little bits of printed paper had been specimens of virgin ore from some gold-mine newly discovered by Mr. Hawkehurst. And then these foolish lovers kissed each other, as William Lee and his wife may have embraced after the penniless young student had perfected his invention of the stocking-frame.

"Forty pounds!" exclaimed Miss Halliday, "all won by your pen, and your poor fingers, and your poor, poor head! How it must ache after a long day's work! How clever you must be, Valentine!"

"Yes, dear; amazingly clever. Clever enough to know that you are the dearest girl in Christendom."

"Don't talk nonsense, sir! You are not clever enough to have the privilege of doing that yet awhile. I mean, how learned you must be to

know such lots of things, all about Erasmus, and Galileo, and—"

"No, my darling, not Erasmus and Galileo. I knew all about Erasmus last week; but I am working at my paper on Galileo now, an exhaustive review of all the books that were ever written on the subject, in ten pages. I don't ask other people to remember what I write, you know, my dear, and I don't pledge myself to remember it. That sort of thing won't keep. There is a kind of sediment, no doubt, in one's note-book; but the effervescence of that vintage goes off rather quickly."

"I only know that you are a very clever person, and that one obtains an immensity of information from your writings," said Charlotte.

"Yes, dearest, there is a kind of wine that must be made into negus for such pretty little topers as you—the 'Wine of Cyprus,' as Mrs. Browning called it. It is better for pretty girls to have the negus than to have nothing, or only weak home-brewed stuff that results in headache. My dearest, Fate has been very good to me, and

I love my profession of letters. I am sure that of all educational processes there is none better than book-making; and the man who begins by making books must be dolt, dunce, and dunderhead, if he do not end by writing them. So you may yet hope to see the morning that shall make your Valentine famous—for a fortnight. What man can hope to be famous for *more* than a fortnight in such a railroad age as this?"

During this halcyon period, in which Mr. Hawkehurst cultivated alternately the society of the Muses and his mistress, he saw little or nothing of George Sheldon. He had washed his hands of all share in the work of establishing Charlotte Halliday's claim to the Reverend John Haygarth's thousands. Indeed, since that interview in which Philip Sheldon had made so light of his stepdaughter's chances, and ratified his consent to her marriage with so humble a literary adventurer as himself, Mr. Hawkehurst had come to consider the Haygarthian inheritance as altogether a visionary business. If it were certain, or even probable, that Charlotte was to inherit a hundred

thousand pounds, was it likely that Mr. Sheldon would encourage such an alliance? This question Mr. Hawkehurst always answered in the negative; and as days and weeks went by, and he heard no more of the Haygarth fortune, the idea of Charlotte's wealth became more and more shadowy.

If there were anything doing in this matter, the two brothers were now working together, and George had no further need of Valentine's help.

The two brothers were not working entirely together. Philip Sheldon had taken the matter into his own strong hand, and George found it very difficult to hold an inch of ground against that formidable antagonist. The papers and information which George had boasted of to Valentine, and the possession whereof was, as he asserted, the very keystone of the arch, proved to be of such small account that he ultimately consented to hand them over to his brother on the payment of expenses out of pocket, and a bonus of one hundred and fifty pounds, together with a written undertaking from Miss Halliday to pay him the fifth

share of any fortune recovered by means of those papers.

This undertaking had been executed in the easiest manner.

"My brother has taken it into his wise head that there is some unclaimed stock standing in your grandfather's name which you are entitled to, Lotta," Mr. Sheldon said one morning; "and he wants to recover the amount for you, on condition of receiving a clear fifth when the sum is recovered. Have you any objection to sign such an undertaking?"

"Dear papa, how can I object?" cried Charlotte gaily. "Why, stocks are money, are they not? How fortunate we are, and how rich we are getting!"

"We!"

"Valentine and I," murmured the girl, blushing. "I cannot help thinking of him when any windfall of good fortune comes to me. What do you think, papa? He has saved forty pounds in little more than three months—all earned by his pen!"

"Behold
The arch-enchanter's wand! Itself a nothing;
But taking sorcery from the master-hand
To paralyse the Cæsars, and to strike
The loud earth breathless!"

And Miss Halliday spouted the glowing lines of the noble dramatist with charming enthusiasm. She signed the required undertaking without looking at it, and it was duly witnessed by her stepfather.

"In your talk with your mother and Valentine, I should advise you to be as silent about this small business as about your own little fortune," Mr. Sheldon remarked presently.

"Musn't I tell Valentine?" cried Charlotte, making a wry face; "I should so like to tell him—just about these stocks. I daresay *he* knows what stocks are; and it would be such cheering news for him, after he has worked his poor brain so for that forty pounds. I don't so much care about telling poor mamma; for she does exclaim and wonder so about things, that it is quite fatiguing to hear her. But please let me tell Valentine?"

Miss Halliday pursed-up her lips and offered her stepfather one of those kisses which she had of late been prompted to bestow on him out of the gratitude of a heart overflowing with girlish joy. He took the kiss as he might have taken a dose of medicine, but did not grant the request preferred by it.

"If you want to be a fool, you can tell your lover of this windfall; but if you wish to prove yourself a sensible girl, you will hold your tongue. He has saved forty pounds by hard work in the last three months, you say: do you think he would have saved forty pence if he had known that you had five thousand pounds at his disposal? I know that class of men; look at Goldsmith, the man who wrote the *Vicar of Wakefield*, and *Rasselas*, and *Clarissa Harlowe*, and so on. I have read somewhere that he never wrote except under coercion—that is to say, want of money."

Charlotte acknowledged the wisdom of this argument, and submitted. She was not what is called a strong-minded woman; and, indeed,

strength of mind is not a plant indigenous to the female nature, but an exceptional growth developed by exceptional circumstances. In Charlotte's life there had been nothing exceptional, and she was in all things soft and womanly, ready to acknowledge, and to be guided by, the wisdom of her seniors. So Valentine heard nothing of the undertaking executed by his lady-love.

After this, Mr. Sheldon took counsel's opinion, and set to work in real earnest to recover the estate of the deceased John Haygarth from the yawning jaws of that tame but all-devouring monster, the Crown. The work was slow, and the dryasdust details thereof need not be recorded here. It had but just begun when Horatio Paget suddenly returned from his Continental expedition, and established himself once more in the Omega-street lodgings.

CHAPTER II.

CAPTAIN PAGET AWAKENS TO A SENSE OF HIS DUTY.

CAPTAIN PAGET'S return was made known to the Sheldon circle by a letter from the returning wanderer to his daughter. The Captain was laid up with rheumatic gout, and wrote quite piteously to implore a visit from Diana. Miss Paget, always constant to the idea of a duty to be performed on her side, even to this *père prodigue*, obeyed the summons promptly, with the full approval of Georgy, always goodnatured, after her own fussy manner.

"And if you'd like to take your papa a bottle of Mr. Sheldon's old port, Diana, remember it's at your disposal. I'm sure I've heard people say that old port is good for the gout—or perhaps, by the bye, what I heard was that it *wasn't* good. I know old port and gout seem to run together

in my head, somehow. But if there's anything in the house your papa would like, Diana—wine, or gunpowder tea, or the eider-down coverlet off the spare bed, or the parlour croquet to amuse him of an evening, or a new novel—surely one couldn't forfeit one's subscription by lending a book to a non-subscribing invalid?"

While Georgy was suggesting the loan of almost every portable object in the house as a specific for Captain Paget's gout, Charlotte sent for a cab, and made things smooth for her friend's departure. She wrapped her warmly against the February blast, and insisted upon going out to see her seated in the cab, whereby she offered to the pedestrians of that neighbourhood a seraphic vision of loveliness with tumbled hair. Charlotte had been always delightful, but Charlotte engaged to Valentine Hawkehurst was a creature of supernal sweetness and brightness—a radiant ministering angel, hovering lightly above a world too common for her foot to rest upon.

Miss Paget found her father suffering from a by no means severe attack of a respectable

family gout, a little peevish from the effects of this affliction, but by no means depressed in mind. He had, indeed, the manner of a man with whom things are going pleasantly. There was a satisfaction in his tone, a placidity in his face, except when distorted for the moment by a twinge of pain, that were new to Diana, who had not been accustomed to behold the brighter side of her father's disposition. He seemed grateful for his daughter's visit, and received her with unwonted kindness of manner.

"You have come very promptly, my dear, and I am gratified by your early compliance with my request," he said with dignified affection, after he had given his daughter the kiss of greeting. "I was a great sufferer last night, Diana, a great sufferer, a prisoner to this chair, and the woman below attempted to send me up a dinner—*such* a dinner! One would think a very small degree of education necessary for the stewing of a kidney, but the things that woman gave me last night were like morsels of stewed leather. I am not an epicure, Diana; but with

such a constitution as mine, good cooking is a vital necessity. Life in lodgings for a man of my age is a sore trial, my dear. I wish you were well married, Diana, and could give your father a humble corner at your fireside."

Diana smiled. It was a somewhat bitter smile; and there was scorn of herself, as well as scorn of her father, in that bitterness.

"I am not the sort of person to marry well, papa," she said.

"Who knows? You are handsomer than nine-tenths of the women who marry well."

"No, papa; that is your sanguine manner of looking at your own property. And even if I were married to someone to whom I might give obedience and duty, and all that kind of thing, in exchange for a comfortable home, as they say in the advertisements, would you be content with a peaceful corner by my fireside? Do you think you would never pine for clubs and gaming-tables—nay, even for creditors to—to diplomatise with, and difficulties to surmount?"

"No, my dear. I am an old man; the clubs

and gaming-houses have done with me, and I with them. I went to see a man at Arthur's a few months ago. I had written to him on a little matter of business—in fact, to be candid with you, my love, for the loan of a five-pound note—and I called at the club for his reply. I caught sight of my face in a distant glass as I was waiting in the strangers' room, and I thought I was looking at a ghost. There comes a time towards the close of a long troublesome life in which a man begins to feel like a ghost. His friends are gone, and his money is gone, his health is gone, his good looks are gone; and the only mistake seems to be that the man himself should be left behind. I remember an observation of Lord Chesterfield's: 'Lord * * * * and I have been dead for the last two years, but we don't tell anyone so,' he said; and there are few old men who couldn't say the same. But I am not downhearted to-day, my dear. No, the habit of hoping has never quite deserted me; and it is only now and then that I take a dismal view of life. Come, my love, lay aside your bonnet and things. Dear

me! what a handsome black-silk dress, and how well you look in it!"

"It is a present from Charlotte, papa. She has a very liberal allowance of pocket-money, and is generosity itself. I don't like to take so much from her, but I only wound her by a refusal."

"Of course, my dear. There is nothing so ungracious as a refusal, and no mark of high breeding so rare as the art of gracious acceptance. Any booby can give a present; but to receive a gift without churlish reticence or florid rapture is no easy accomplishment. I am always pleased to see you well dressed, my love"—Diana winced as she remembered her shabby hat and threadbare gown at Fôretdechêne—"and I am especially pleased to see you elegantly attired this evening, as I expect a gentleman by and by."

"A gentleman, papa!" exclaimed Miss Paget, with considerable surprise; "I thought that you had sent for me because you were ill and depressed and lonely."

"Well, yes, Diana, I certainly am ill; and I

suppose it is scarcely unnatural that a father should wish to see his only daughter."

Diana was silent. A father's wish to see his daughter was indeed natural and common; but that Captain Paget, who in no period of his daughter's life had evinced for her the common affection of paternity, should be seized all of a sudden with a yearning for her society, was somewhat singular. But Diana's nature had been ennobled and fortified by the mental struggle and the impalpable sacrifice of the last few months, and she was in nowise disposed to repel any affectionate feeling of her father's, even at this eleventh hour.

"*He* tells us the eleventh hour is not too late," she thought. "If it is not too late in the sight of that Divine Judge, shall it be thought too late by an erring creature like me?"

After a few minutes of thoughtful silence, she knelt down by her father's chair and kissed him.

"My dear father," she murmured softly, "believe me, I am very pleased to think you should wish to see me. I will come to you

whenever you like to send for me. I am glad not to be a burden to you; but I should wish to be a comfort when I can."

The Captain shed his stock tear. It signified something nearer akin to real emotion than usual.

"My dear girl," he said, "this is very pleasing, very pleasing indeed. The day may come—I cannot just now say when—and events may arise—which—the nature of which I am not yet in a position to indicate to you—but the barren fig-tree may not be always fruitless. In its old age the withered trunk may put forth fresh branches. We will say no more of this, my love; and I will only remark that you may not go unrequited for any affection bestowed on your poor old father."

Diana smiled, and this time it was a pensive rather than a bitter smile. She had often heard her father talk like this before. She had often heard these oracular hints of some grand event looming mighty in the immediate future; but she had never seen the vague prophecy accomplished. Always a schemer, and always alternating between the boastful confidence of hope and the

peevish bewailings of despair, the Captain had built his castle to-day to sit among its ruins to-morrow, ever since she had known him.

So she set little value on his hopeful talk of this evening, but was content to see him in good spirits. He contemplated her admiringly as she knelt by his easy-chair, and smoothed the shining coils of her dark hair with a gentle hand, as he looked downward at the thoughtful face—proud and grave, but not ungentle.

"You are a very handsome girl, Diana," he murmured, as much to himself as to his daughter; "yes, very handsome. Egad, I had no idea how handsome!"

"What has put such a fancy into your head to-night, papa?" asked Diana, laughing. "I do not believe in the good looks you are so kind as to attribute to me. When I see my face in the glass I perceive a pale, gloomy countenance that is by no means pleasing."

"You may be out of spirits when you look in the glass. I hope you are not unhappy at Bayswater."

"Why should I be unhappy, papa? No sister was ever kinder or more loving than Charlotte Halliday is to me. I should be very ungrateful to Providence as well as to her if I did not appreciate such affection. How many lonely girls, like me, go through life without picking up a sister!"

"Yes, you are right, my dear. Those Sheldon people have been very useful to you. They are not the kind of people I should have wished a daughter of mine to be *like* with, if I were in the position my birth entitles me to occupy; but as I am not in that position, I submit. That black silk becomes you admirably. And now, my love, be so kind as to ring the bell for lights and tea."

They had been sitting in the firelight—the mystic, magical, capricious firelight—which made even that tawdry lodging-house parlour seem a pleasant chamber. The tea-tray was brought, and candles. Diana seated herself at the table, and made tea with the contents of a little mahogany caddy.

"Don't pour out the tea just yet," said the Captain; "I expect a gentleman. I don't sup-

pose he'll take tea, but it will look more civil to wait for him."

"And who is this mysterious gentleman, papa?"

"A Frenchman; a man I met while I was abroad."

"*Really* a gentleman?"

"Certainly, Diana," replied her father, with offended dignity. "Do you think I should admit any person to my friendship who is not a gentleman? My business relations I am powerless to govern; but friendship is a different matter. There is no man more exclusive than Horatio Paget. M. Lenoble is a gentleman of ancient lineage and amiable character."

"And rich, I suppose, papa?" asked Diana. She thought that her father would scarcely speak of the gentleman in a tone so profoundly respectful if he were not rich.

"Yes, Diana. M. Lenoble is master of a very fair estate, and is likely to be much richer before he dies."

"And he has been kind to you, papa?"

"Yes, he has shown me hospitality during my residence in Normandy. You need not speak of him to your friends the Sheldons."

"Not even to Charlotte?"

"Not even to Charlotte. I do not care to have my affairs discussed by that class of people."

"But, dear papa, why make a mystery about so unimportant a matter?"

"I do not make a mystery; but I hate gossip. Mrs. Sheldon is an incorrigible gossip, and I daresay her daughter is no better."

"Charlotte is an angel, papa!"

"That is very possible. But I beg that you will refrain from discussing my friend M. Lenoble in her angelic presence."

"As you please, papa," said Diana gravely. She felt herself bound to obey her father in this small matter; but the idea of this mystery and secrecy was very unwelcome to her. It implied that her father's acquaintance with this Frenchman was only a part of some new scheme. It was no honest friendship, which the Captain might be proud to own, glad to show the world that in these

days of decadence he could still point to a friend. It was only some business alliance, underhand and stealthy: a social conspiracy, that must needs be conducted in darkness.

"Why did papa summon me here if he wants his acquaintance with this man kept secret?" she asked herself; and the question seemed unanswerable.

She pictured this M. Lenoble to herself—a wizened, sallow-faced Macchiavellian individual, whose business in England must needs be connected with conspiracy, treason, commercial fraud, anything or everything stealthy and criminal.

"I wish you would let me go back to Bayswater before this gentleman comes, papa," she said presently. "I heard it strike seven just now, and I know I shall be expected early. I can come again whenever you like."

"No, no, my love; you must stop to see my friend. And now tell me a little about the Sheldons. Has anything been stirring since I saw them last?"

"Nothing whatever, papa. Charlotte is very

happy; she always had a happy disposition, but she is gayer than ever since her engagement with — Valentine."

"What an absurd infatuation!" muttered the Captain.

"And he—Valentine—is very good, and works very hard at his literary profession—and loves her very dearly."

It cost her an effort to say this even now, even now when she fancied herself cured of that folly which had once been so sweet to her. To speak of him like this—to put him away out of her own life, and contemplate him as an element in the life of another—could not be done without some touch of the old anguish.

There was a loud double-knock at the street-door as she said this, and a step sounded presently in the passage; a quick, firm tread. There was nothing stealthy about that, at any rate.

"My friend Lenoble," said the Captain; and in the next instant a gentleman entered the room, a gentleman who was in every quality the opposite of the person whom Diana had expected to see.

These speculative pictures are seldom good portraits. Miss Paget had expected to find her father's ally small and shrivelled, old and ugly, dried-up and withered in the fiery atmosphere of fraud and conspiracy; in outward semblance a monkey, in soul a tiger. And instead of this obnoxious creature, there burst into the room a man of four-and-thirty years of age, tall, stalwart, with a fair frank face, somewhat browned by summer suns; thick auburn hair and beard, close trimmed and cropped in the approved Gallic fashion—clear earnest blue eyes, and a mouth whose candour and sweetness a moustache could not hide. Henry of Navarre, before the white lilies of France had dazzled his eyes with their fatal splendour, before the court of the Medici had taught the Bearnois to dissemble, before the sometime Protestant champion had put on that apparel of stainless white in which he went forth to stain his soul with the sin of a diplomatic apostasy.

Such a surprise as this makes a kind of crisis in the eventless record of a woman's life. Diana found herself blushing as the stranger stood near

the door awaiting her father's introduction. She was ashamed to think of the wrong her imagination had done him.

"My daughter, Diana Paget—M. Lenoble. I have been telling Diana how much I owed to your hospitality during my stay in Normandy," continued the Captain, with his grandest air. "I regret that I can only receive you in an apartment quite unworthy the seigneur of Côtenoir.—A charming place, my dear Diana, which I should much like you to see on some future occasion.—Will you take some tea, Lenoble?—Diana, a cup of tea.—The Pagets are a fallen race, you see, my dear sir, and a cup of tea in a lodging-house parlour is the best entertainment I can give to a friend. The Cromie Pagets of Hertfordshire will give you dinner in gold plate, with a footman standing behind the chair of every guest; but our branch is a younger and a poorer one, and I, among others, am paying the price of youthful follies."

Gustave Lenoble looked sympathetic, but the glance of sympathy was directed to Diana, and not to the male representative of the younger Pagets.

To pity the distressed damsel was an attribute of the Lenoble mind; and Gustave had already begun to pity Miss Paget, and to wonder what her fate in life would be, with no better protector than a father who was confessedly a pauper. He saw that the young lady was very handsome, and he divined, from some indefinable expression of her face, that she was proud; and as he thought of his own daughters, and their easy life and assured future, the contrast seemed to him very cruel.

Chivalrous as the house of Lenoble might be by nature, he could scarcely have felt so keen an interest in Captain Paget's daughter at the first glance, if his sympathies had not been already enlisted for her. The noble Horatio, though slow to act a father's part, had shown himself quick to make capital out of his daughter's beauty and virtues when the occasion offered.

In his intercourse with the seigneur of Côte-noir, which had developed from a mere business acquaintance into friendship, Captain Paget had discoursed with much eloquence upon the subject of his motherless daughter; and M. Lenoble, hav-

ing daughters of his own, also motherless, lent him the ear of sympathy.

"I have heard much of you, Miss Paget," said Gustave presently, "and of your devotion to your father. He has no more favourite theme than your goodness."

Diana blushed, and Diana's father blushed also. That skilled diplomatist felt the awkwardness of the situation, and was prompt to the rescue.

"Yes," he said, "my daughter has been a heroine. There are Antigones, sir, who show their heroic nature by other service than the leading to and fro of a blind father. From the earliest age my poor child has striven to stand alone; too proud, too noble to be a burden on a parent whose love would have given all, but whose means could give but little. And now she comes to me from her home among strangers, to soothe my hour of pain and infirmity. I trust your daughters may prove as worthy of your love, M. Lenoble."

"They are very dear girls," answered the Frenchman, "but for them life has been all sun-

shine. They have never known a sorrow except the death of their mother. It is the storm that tests the temper of the tree. I wish they might prove as noble in adversity as Miss Paget has shown herself."

This was more than Diana could bear without some kind of protest.

"You must not take papa's praises *au pied de la lettre*, M. Lenoble," she said; "I have been by no means brave or patient under adversity. There are troubles which one must bear. I have borne mine somehow; but I claim no praise for having submitted to the inevitable."

This was spoken with a certain noble pride which impressed Gustave more than all the father's florid eloquence had done. After this the conversation became less personal. M. Lenoble talked of England. It was not his first visit, but he had only the excursionist's knowledge of the British Isles.

"I have been to Scotland," he said. "Your Scotland is grand, mountainous; all that there is of the most savage and poetic. It is a Switzer-

land lined with Brittany. But that which most speaks to the heart of a stranger is the peaceful beauty of your English landscape."

"You like England, M. Lenoble?" said Diana.

"Have I not reason? My mother was English. I was only five years old when I lost her. She went out of my life like a dream; but I can still recall a faint shadow of her face—an English face—a countenance of placid sadness, very sweet and tender. But why do I talk of these things?"

On this the Frenchman's talk took a gayer turn. This M. Lenoble showed himself a lively and agreeable companion. He talked of Normandy, his daughters and their convent, his little son at Rouen, his aunt Cydalise, the quiet old lady at Beaubocage; his grandfather, his grandmother, the old servants, and everything familiar and dear to him. He told of his family history with boyish candour, untainted by egotism, and seemed much pleased by Diana's apparent interest in his unstudied talk. He was quite unconscious that the diplomatic Horatio was leading him on to talk of these things, with a view to making the conver-

sation supremely interesting to him. That arch diplomatist knew that there is nothing a man likes better than talking of his own affairs, if he can have a decent excuse for such discourse.

The clock struck nine while Diana was listening, really interested. This glimpse of a life so far apart from her own was a relief, after the brooding introspective reveries which of late had constituted so large a portion of her existence. She started up at the sound of the clock.

"What now, Cinderella?" cried her father. "Have you stopped beyond your time, and will your fairy-godmother be angry?"

"No one will be angry, papa; but I did not mean to stay so late. I am sorry your description of Normandy has been so interesting, M. Lenoble."

"Come and see Vevinord and Côtenoir, and you will judge for yourself. The townhall of Vevinord is almost as fine as that of Louvain; and we have a church that belongs to the time of Dagobert."

"She shall see them before long," said the Captain; "I shall have business in Rouen again

before the next month is out; and if my daughter is a good girl, I will take her over there with me."

Diana stared at her father in utter bewilderment. What could be the meaning of this sudden display of affection?

"I should not be free to go with you, papa, even if you were able to take me," she replied somewhat coldly; "I have other duties."

She felt assured that there was some lurking motive, some diplomatic art at the bottom of the Captain's altered conduct, and she could not altogether repress her scorn. The astute Horatio saw that he had gone a little too far, and that his only child was not of the stuff to be moulded at will by his dexterous hands.

"You will come and see me again, Diana?" he said in a pleading tone; "I am likely to be a prisoner to this room for a week or more."

"Certainly, papa; I will come, if you wish it. When shall I come?"

"Well, let me see—to-day is Thursday; can you come on Monday?"

"Yes, I will come on Monday."

A cab was procured, and Miss Paget was conducted to that vehicle by her new acquaintance, who showed a gallant anxiety for her comfort on the journey, and was extremely careful about the closing of the windows. She arrived at Bayswater before ten; but being forbidden to talk of M. Lenoble, could give but a scanty account of her evening.

"And was your papa kind, dear?" asked Charlotte, "and did he seem pleased to see you?"

"He was much kinder and more affectionate than usual, Lotta dear; so much so, that he set me wondering. Now, if I were as confiding and eager to think well of people as you are, I should be quite delighted by this change. As it is, I am only mystified. I should be very glad if my father and I could be drawn closer together; very glad if my influence could bring about an amendment in his life."

While Miss Paget was discussing her father's affectionate and novel behaviour, the noble Horatio

was meditating, by his solitary hearth, upon the events of the evening.

"I'm half-inclined to think he's hit already," mused the Captain. "I must not allow myself to be deluded by manner. A Frenchman's gallantry rarely means much: but Lenoble is one of those straightforward fellows whose thoughts may be read by a child. He certainly seemed pleased with her; interested and sympathetic, and all that kind of thing. And she is an uncommonly handsome girl, and might marry anyone if she had the opportunity. I had no idea she was so handsome until to-night. I suppose I never noticed her by candlelight before. By Jove! I ought to have made her an actress, or singer, or something of that kind. And so I might, if I'd known her face would light up as it does. I wish she wasn't so impracticable—always cutting in with some awkward speech, that makes me look like a fool; when, if she had an ounce of common sense, she might see that I'm trying to make her fortune. Yes, egad, and such a fortune as few girls drop into nowadays! Some of your straitlaced church-

going people would call me a neglectful father to that girl, I daresay; but I think if I succeed in making her the wife of Gustave Lenoble, I shall have done my duty in a way that very few fathers can hope to surpass. Such a high-principled fellow as Lenoble is too!—and *that* is a consideration."

CHAPTER III.

"WHAT DO WE HERE, MY HEART AND I?"

AFTER that first summons to Chelsea, Diana went many times—twice and three times a week—to comfort and tend her invalid father. Captain Paget's novel regard for his only child seemed to increase with the familiarity of frequent intercourse.

"I have had very great pleasure in making your acquaintance, my dear Diana," he said one day, in the course of a *tête-à-tête* with his daughter; "and I am charmed to find you everything that a well-born and well-bred young woman ought to be. I am sure you have excellent reason to be grateful to your cousin, Priscilla Paget, for the excellent education you received in her abode; and you have some cause to thank me

for the dash and style imparted to your carriage and manner by our foreign wanderings."

The Captain said this with the air of a man who had accompanied his daughter on the grand tour solely with a view to her intellectual improvement. He really thought she had reason to be grateful to him for those accidents of his nomadic life which had secured her a good accent for French and German, and the art of putting on her shawl.

"Yes, my dear child," he continued with dignity, "it affords me real gratification to know you better. I need scarcely say that when you were the associate of my pilgrimage, you were not of an age to be available as a companion. To a man of the world like myself, a young person who has not done growing must always savour somewhat of the schoolroom and the nursery. I am not going to repeat the Byronic impertinence about bread-and-butter; but the society of a girl of the hobbledehoy age is apt to be insipid. You are now a young woman, and a young woman of whom any father might with justice be proud."

After a few such speeches as these, Diana began to think that it was just possible her father might really experience some novel feeling of regard for her. It might be true that his former coldness had been no more than a prejudice against the awkwardness of girlhood.

"I was shabby and awkward, I daresay, in those days," she thought; "and then I was always asking papa for money to buy new clothes; and that may have set him against me. And now that I am no burden upon him, and can talk to him and amuse him, he may feel more kindly disposed towards me."

There was some foundation for this idea. Captain Paget had felt himself more kindly disposed towards his only child from the moment in which she ceased to be an encumbrance upon him. Her sudden departure from Forêtdechêne had been taken in very good part by him.

"A very spirited thing for her to do, Val," he had said, when informed of the fact by Mr. Hawkehurst; "and by far the best thing she could do, under the circumstances."

From that time his daughter had never asked him for a sixpence, and from that time she had risen steadily in his estimation. But the feeling which he now exhibited was more than placid approval; it was an affection at once warm and exacting. The fact was, that Horatio Paget saw in his daughter the high-road to the acquirement of a handsome competence for his declining years. His affection was sincere so far as it went; a sentiment inspired by feelings purely mercenary, but not a hypocritical assumption. Diana was, therefore, so much the more likely to be softened and touched by it.

She was softened, deeply touched by this late awakening of feeling. The engagement of Valentine and Charlotte had left her own life very blank, very desolate. It was not alone the man she loved who was lost to her; Charlotte, the friend, the sister, seemed also slipping away from her. As kind, as loving, as tender as of old, this dear friend and adopted sister still might be, but no longer wholly her own. Over the hearts of the purest, Eros reigns with a too despotic power, and

mild affection is apt to sneak away into some corner of the temple on whose shrine Love has descended. This mild affection is but a little twinkling taper, that will burn steadily on, perhaps unseen amidst the dazzling glory of Love's supernal lamp, to be found shining benignantly when the lamp is shattered.

For Charlotte, Valentine—and for Valentine, Charlotte—made the sum-total of the universe at this time; or, at best, there was but a small balance which included all the other cares and duties, affections and pleasures, of life. Of this balance Diana had the lion's share; but she felt that things had changed since those days of romantic school-girl friendship in which Charlotte had talked of never marrying, and travelling with her dearest friend Diana amongst all the beautiful scenes they had read of, until they found the loveliest spot in the world, where they would establish themselves in an ideal cottage, and live together for the rest of their lives, cultivating their minds and their flower-garden, working Berlin-wool chairs for their ideal drawing-room,

and doing good to an ideal peasantry, who would be just poor enough to be interesting, and sickly enough to require frequent gifts of calf's-foot jelly and green tea.

Those foolish dreams were done with now; and that other dream, of a life to be spent with the reckless companion of her girlhood, was lost to Diana Paget. There was no point to which she could look forward in the future; no star to lure her onward upon life's journey. Her present position was sufficiently comfortable; and she told herself that she must needs be weak and wicked if she were not content with her lot. But beyond the present she dared not look, so blank was the prospect: a desert, without even the mirage; for her dreams and delusions were gone with her hope.

Possessed by such a sense of loneliness, it is scarcely strange if there seemed to her a gleam of joy, a faint glimmer of hope, in the newly-awakened affection of her father. She began to believe him, and to take comfort from the thought that he was drifting to a haven where he might lie moored, with other battered old hulks of pirate

and privateer, inglorious and at rest. To work for him and succour him in his declining years seemed a brighter prospect to this hopeless woman of four-and-twenty than a future of lonely independence. "It is the nature of woman to lean," says the masculine philosopher; but is it not rather her nature to support and sustain, or else why to her is intrusted the sublime responsibility of maternity? Diana was pleased to think that a remorseful reprobate might be dependent on her toil, and owe his reformation to her influence. She was indeed a new Antigone, ready to lead him in his moral blindness to an altar of atonement, more pure than the ensanguined shrine of the Athenian Eumenides.

Her visits to Omega-street were not entirely devoted to *tête-à-têtes* with her father. By reason of those coincidences which are so common to the lives of some people, it generally happened that M. Lenoble dropped in upon his invalid friend on the very day of Miss Paget's visit. M. Lenoble was in London on business, and this business apparently necessitated frequent interviews with

Captain Paget. Of course such interviews could not take place in the presence of Diana. Gustave was wont, therefore, to wait with praiseworthy patience until the conclusion of the young lady's visit; and would even, with an inconsistent gallantry, urge her to prolong her stay to its utmost limit.

"It will always be time for my affairs, Miss Paget," he urged, "and I know how your father values your society; and he well may value it. I only hope my daughters will be as good to me, if I have the gout, by and by."

Diana had spent nearly a dozen evenings in Omega-street, and on each of those evenings had happened to meet M. Lenoble. She liked him better on every occasion of these accidental meetings. He was indeed a person whom it was difficult for any one to dislike; and in the thirty-four years of his life had never made an enemy. She had been pleased with him on the first evening; his bright handsome face, his courteous reverence for her sex—expressed in every word, every tone, every look—his sympathy with all good thoughts,

his freshness and candour, were calculated to charm the coldest and most difficult of judges. Diana liked, and even admired him, but it was from an abstract point of view. He seemed a creature as remote from her own life as a portrait of Henry of Navarre, seen and admired in some royal picture-gallery to-day, to fade out of her memory to-morrow.

There was only one point in connection with Gustave Lenoble which occupied her serious thoughts; and this was the nature of his relations with her father.

This was a subject that sorely troubled her. Hope as she might for the future, she could not shut her eyes to the past. She knew that her father had lived for years as a cheat and a trickster—now by one species of falsehood and trickery, now by another—rarely incautious, but always unscrupulous. How had this village seigneur of Normandy fallen into the Captain's toils; and what was the nature of the net that was spread for him?

The talk of business, the frequent interviews,

the evident elation of her father's spirits, combined to assure her that some great scheme was in progress, some commercial enterprise, perhaps not entirely dishonest, nay even honest, when regarded from the sanguine speculator's point of view, but involving the hazard of Gustave Lenoble's fortune.

"It is quite as easy for my father to delude himself as it is for him to delude others. This M. Lenoble is ignorant of English commerce, no doubt, and will be ready to believe anything papa tells him. And he is so candid, so trusting, it would be very hard if he were to be a loser through his confidence in papa. His daughters, too; the hazard of his fortune is peril to their future." Such doubts and fears, gradually developed by reflection, took stronger hold on Miss Paget's mind after every fresh visit to Omega-street. She saw the Frenchman's light-hearted confidence in all humanity, her father's specious manner, and air of Quixotic honour. His sanguine tone, his excellent spirits, filled her with intolerable alarm. Alas, when had she ever seen her father

in good spirits, except when some gentlemanly villany was in progress?

Miss Paget endured this uneasiness of mind as long as she could, and then determined to warn the supposed victim. She planned the mode of her warning, and arranged for herself a diplomatic form which would reflect the least possible discredit upon her father; and having once come to this resolution, she was not slow to put it into effect.

When her father was about to send for a cab to convey her back to Bayswater, after her next visit to Omega-street, she surprised him by intercepting his order.

"There is a cab-stand in Sloane-square, papa," she said; "and if M. Lenoble will be so kind as to take me there, I—I would rather get the cab from the stand. The man charges more when he is fetched off the rank, I believe."

She could think of no better excuse for seeing Gustave alone than this most sordid pretence. She blushed as she thought how mean a sound it must have in the ears of the man for whose

advantage she was plotting. Happily, M. Lenoble was not among the people who see nothing but meanness in the desire to save a sixpence. His aunt Cydalise had shown him the loveliness of poverty; for there are vows of holy poverty that need no spoken formula, and that are performed without the cloister.

"Poor girl!" thought M. Lenoble; "I daresay even the cost of her coach is a consideration with her; and one dare not pay the coachman."

This was how Gustave read that blush of shame which for a moment dyed Diana's cheek. Her father's was a very different reading.

"The minx sees my game, and is playing into my hands," thought he; "so demure as she is, too! I should never have supposed her capable of such a clever manœuvre to secure ten minutes' *tête-à-tête* with an eligible admirer."

He bade his daughter good-night with more than usual effusion. He began to think that she might prove herself worthy of him after all.

The district between Omega-street and Sloane-square is, after dusk, of all places the most solitary.

It is the borderland of Pimlico, or, to borrow from Sidney Smith, the knuckle-end of Belgravia. In these regions of desolation and smoke-blackened stucco, Diana and her companion were as secure from the interruption of the jostling crowd as they might have been in the primeval forests of central America.

Miss Paget's task was not a pleasant one. Shape her warning as she might, it must reflect some discredit upon her father. He had of late been kind to her: she felt this keenly to-night, and it seemed that the thing she was about to do was a sort of parricide. Not against her father's life was her cruel hand to be lifted; but her still more cruel tongue was to slay her father's good name.

"This M. Lenoble likes him and trusts him," she thought to herself. "What a happiness for that poor broken-down old man to have so kind a friend! And I am going to interfere in a manner that may put an end to this friendship!"

This is the shape which her thoughts assumed as she walked silently by Gustave's side, with

her hand lying lightly on his arm. He spoke to her two or three times about the dulness of the neighbourhood, the coldness of the night, or some other equally thrilling subject; but, finding by her replies that she was thinking deeply, he made no further attempt at conversation.

"Poor child, she has some trouble on her mind, perhaps," he thought to himself sadly, for his sympathy with this young lady was a very profound feeling. This was the first occasion on which he had ever been alone with her, and he wondered to find what a strange emotion was developed by the novelty of the situation. He had married at twenty years of age, and had never known those brief fancies or foolish passions which waste the freshness of mind and heart. He had married a wife whom he never learned to love; but his nature was so essentially a happy one, that he had failed to discover the something wanting in his life. In all relations—as grandson, husband, father, master—he had been "all simply perfect," as Mademoiselle Cydalise pronounced him; and in a mind occu-

pied by cares for the welfare and happiness of others, he had never found that blank which needed to be filled in order to make his own life completely happy. Only of late, in his thirty-fourth year, had he come to the knowledge of a feeling deeper than dutiful regard for an invalid wife, or affectionate solicitude for motherless children; only of late had he felt his heart stirred by a more thrilling emotion than that placid resignation to the will of Providence which had distinguished his courtship of Mademoiselle de Nérague.

They had nearly reached Sloane-square before Diana took courage to broach the subject so naturally repugnant to her. She had need to remember that the welfare of M. Lenoble and all belonging to him might be dependent on her fortitude.

"M. Lenoble," she began at last, "I am going to say something I shall find it most painful to utter, but which I feel it my duty to say to you. I can only ask you to receive it in a generous spirit."

"But, my dear Miss Paget, I pray you not to say anything that is disagreeable to you. Why should you give yourself pain?—why—"

"Because it is my duty to warn you of a danger which I know only too well, and of which you may be quite ignorant. You are my father's friend, M. Lenoble; and he has very few friends. I should be sorry if anything I were to say should rob him of your regard."

"Nothing that you say shall rob him of my friendship. But why should you persist thus to say anything that is painful? What can you tell me that I do not know, or that I cannot guess? Will you tell me that he is poor? But I know it. That he is a broken-down gentleman? And that also I know. What, then, would you tell me? That he has a daughter who is to him a treasure without price? Ah, mademoiselle, what must I be if I did not know that also; I, who have contemplated that daughter so many times—ah, so many!—when she could not know with what sympathy my eyes watched her dutiful looks, with what profound emotion my

heart interpreted her life of affectionate sacrifice."

There was a warmth, a tenderness in his tones which touched Diana's heart as it had not been touched of late. Suddenly, unexpectedly, the full meaning of those tender accents came home to her. The love that she had once dreamed of from the lips of another spoke to her to-night in the words of this stranger. The sympathy for which she had yearned long ago, in the days of her wanderings with Valentine, was given to her to-night without stint or measure. Unhappily, it came too late; and it did not come from the only lips which, as it seemed to her to-night, could make sympathy precious or love divine. But to this lonely girl a good man's affection seemed a treasure for which she must needs be deeply grateful. It was something to discover that she could be loved.

"I too," she said to herself,—"I, of whose presence Valentine is scarcely conscious when he enters a room where Charlotte and I are together; I, whom he greets day after day with the same

careless words, the same indifferent look; I, who might fade and waste day by day with some slow disease, until I sank into the grave, before *he* would be conscious of any change in my face,—is it possible that amongst the same race of beings there can be any creature so widely different from Valentine Hawkehurst as to love *me?*"

This was the bitter complaint of her heart, as she compared the tenderness of this stranger with the indifference of the man to whom, for three long years of her girlhood, she had given every dream, every thought, every hope of her existence. She could not put him away from her heart all at once. The weak heart still fondly clung to the dear, familiar image. But the more intensely she had felt the cold neglect of Valentine, the more grateful to her seemed the unsought affection of Gustave Lenoble.

"You know me as little as you know my father, M. Lenoble," she said, after a long pause, during which they had walked to the end of the long dull street, and were close to the square. "Let us go back a little way, please; I have much

more to say. I wish you to be my father's friend always, but, if possible, without danger to yourself. My father is one of those sanguine people who are always ready to embark in some new enterprise, and who go on hoping and dreaming, after the failure of a dozen schemes. He has no money, that I know of, to lose himself, and that fact may make him, unconsciously, reckless of other people's money. I have heard him speak of business relations with you, M. Lenoble, and it is on that account I venture to speak so plainly. I do not want my poor father to delude you, as he has often deluded himself. If you have already permitted him to involve you in any speculation, I entreat you to try to withdraw from it—to lose a little money, if necessary, rather than to lose all. If you are not yet involved, let my warning save you from any hazard."

"My dear Miss Paget, I thank you a thousand times for your advice, your noble thoughtfulness for others. But no, there is no hazard. The business in which your father is occupied for me is not a speculation. It involves no risk beyond

the expenditure of a few thousand francs, which, happily, I can afford to lose. I am not at liberty to tell you the nature of the business in question, because I have promised your father to keep that a secret. Dear young lady, you need have no fear for me. I am not a rash speculator. The first years of my life were passed in extreme poverty—the poverty that is near neighbour to starvation. That is a lesson one cannot forget. How shall I thank you for your concern for me—so generous, so noble!"

"It was only my duty to warn you of my poor father's weakness," replied Diana. "If I needed thanks, your kindness to him is the only boon I could ask. He has bitter need of a friend."

"And he shall never lack one while I live; if only for your sake." The last half of the sentence was spoken in lower tones than the first. Diana was conscious of the lurking tenderness of those few words, and the consciousness embarrassed her. Happily they had reached the end of the quiet street by this time, and had emerged into the

busier square. No more was said till they reached the cab-stand, when Diana wished her companion good-night.

"I am going back to Normandy in a week, Miss Paget; shall I see you again before I leave England?"

"I really don't know; our meetings are generally accidental, you see."

"O yes, of course, always accidental," replied Gustave, smiling.

"I am sorry you are going to leave London—for papa's sake."

"And I too am sorry—for my own sake. But, you see, when one has daughters, and a farm, and a château, one must be on the spot. I came to England for one week only, and I have stayed six."

"You have found so much to amuse you in London?"

"Nay, mademoiselle, so much to interest me."

"It is almost the same thing, is it not?"

"A thousand times no! To be amused and to

be interested,—ah, what can be so widely different as those two conditions of mind!"

"Indeed! Good-night, M. Lenoble. Please ask the cabman to drive as fast as he can venture to do with consideration for his horse. I am afraid I shall be late, and my friends will be anxious about me."

"You will be late. You consider your friends at Bayswater, and you consider even the cabman's horse. You are charity itself. Will you not consider me a little also, Miss Paget?"

"But how?"

"Let me see you before I go back to Normandy. Your papa likes to see you twice a-week, I know. This is Monday night; will you come to see him on Thursday?"

"If he wishes it."

"He does wish it. Ah, how he wishes it! You will come?"

"If Mrs. Sheldon and Charlotte can spare me."

"They cannot spare you. No one can spare you. That cannot be. It is amongst the things

that are impossible. But they will have pity upon —your father; and they will let you come."

"Please ask the cabman to start. Indeed, I shall be late. Good-night, M. Lenoble."

"Good-night."

He took her hand in his, and kissed it, with the grace of a Bayard. He loved her, and took no trouble to conceal his passion. No shadow of doubt darkened that bright horizon to which M. Lenoble looked with hopeful eyes. He loved this penniless, motherless girl, as it was in the blood of the Lenobles to love the poor and the helpless; especially when poverty and helplessness presented themselves in the guise of youth and beauty. He loved her, and she would love him. But why not? He was ten years her senior, but that makes nothing. His auburn hair and beard, in the style of Henry the Great, could show no streak of gray. His eyes had the brightness of one-and-twenty; for the eyes of a man whose soul preserves its youthfulness will keep their clear lustre for half a century. The tall figure, straight as a dart; the frank handsome face which M. Lenoble saw

in the glass when he made his toilet, were not calculated to dishearten a hopeful lover; and Gustave, by nature sanguine, enjoyed his dream of happiness, untroubled by one morbid apprehension.

He loved her, and he would ask her for his wife. She would accept his offer; her father would rejoice in so fortunate an alliance; her friends of Bayswater would felicitate a change so desirable. And when he returned to Normandy he would take her with him, and say to his children: "Behold your mother!" And then the great rambling mansion of Côtenoir would assume a home-like aspect. The ponderous old furniture would be replaced by lightsome appointments of modern fashion; except, of course, in the grand drawing-room, where there were tapestries said to be from the designs of Boucher, and chairs and sofas, in the true Louis-Quinze style, of immovable bulkiness.

There was but one trifling hitch in the whole scheme of happiness—Diana was a Protestant. Ah, but what then! A creature to sweet, so noble, could not long remain the slave of Anglican heresy.

A little talk with Cydalise, a week's "retreat" at the Sacré Cœur, and the thing would be done. The dear girl would renounce her errors, and enter the bosom of the Mother Church. Pouff! M. Lenoble blew the little difficulty away from his finger-tips, and then wafted a kiss from the same finger-tips to his absent beloved.

"And this noble heart warned me against her own father!" M. Lenoble said to himself as he walked towards the hotel at Blackfriars where he had taken up his abode, quite unconscious that the foot of Blackfriars Bridge was not the centre of West-end London. "How noble, how disinterested! Poor old man! He is, no doubt, a speculator; something even of an adventurer. What then? He shall have an apartment at Côtenoir, his place at the family-table, his *fauteuil* by the hearth; and there he can do no harm."

There was a strange sentiment in Diana's mind after this evening's conversation with Gustave Lenoble. To feel herself beloved, to know that there was some one creature in the wide,

crowded world interested in, nay even attached to, her was a mystery, a surprise, and in some sort a source of pleasure to her. That Gustave Lenoble could ever be any nearer to her than he was at the present time did not occur to her as being within the limits of possibility. She had thrust Valentine from her heart, but the empty chamber could receive no new tenant. It was not swept and garnished; nay, indeed, it was sadly littered with the shreds and patches left by the late occupant. But, while this was so, to know that she could be loved was in some manner sweet to her.

"Ah, now I know that the poet is right," she said to herself. "There is no creature so desolate but some heart responds unto its own. And I have found the generous responsive heart that can pity and love me because I seem so sorely to need love and pity. All my life—my blank, empty life—I will remember and be grateful to him, the first good man who ever called my father friend; the first of all mankind who thought this poor hand worthy to be lifted to his lips."

CHAPTER IV.

SHARPER THAN A SERPENT'S TOOTH.

HAVING pledged herself to visit Omega-street on Thursday, Diana considered herself bound to perform that promise. She felt, however, that there was some touch of absurdity in the position, for to keep a promise so made was in a manner to keep an appointment with M. Lenoble.

"I daresay he has a habit of falling in love with every young woman he meets," she thought, when she considered his conduct from a more prosaic standpoint than the grateful enthusiasm his generous sympathy had at first awakened in her mind. "I have heard that it is a Frenchman's faculty to consider himself irresistible, and to avow his adoration for a new divinity every week. And I was so foolish as to fancy there

was a depth of feeling in his tone and manner! I am sure he is all that is good and generous; but the falling in love is no doubt a national failing."

She remembered the impertinent advances of divers unknown foreigners whom she had encountered on pier or *digue*, kursaal or beach, in the frequently unprotected hours of her Continental wanderings.

She had not seen the best side of the foreign mind in her character of unattended and doubtfully attired English demoiselle. She knew that Gustave Lenoble was of a very different stamp from those specimens of the genus tiger, whose impertinent admiration had often wounded and distressed her; but she was inclined to attribute the fault of shallowness to a nature so frank and buoyant as that of her father's friend.

She walked from Bayswater to Chelsea on the appointed Thursday, for the cost of frequent journeys in cabs was more than her purse could supply. The walk across the Park was pleasant even in the bleak March weather, and she entered

the little parlour in Omega-street with the bloom of damask roses upon her cheeks.

"How do you do, papa dear?" she began, as she came into the dusky room; but the figure sitting in her father's accustomed place was not that of her father. It was M. Lenoble, who rose to welcome her.

"Is papa worse?" she asked, surprised by the Captain's absence.

"On the contrary, he is better, and has gone out in a hired carriage for a breath of fresh air. I persuaded him to go. He will be back very shortly."

"I wrote to tell him I should be here to-day, but I am very glad he has gone out, for I am sure the air will do him good. Was he well wrapped up, do you know, M. Lenoble?"

"Enveloped in railway-rugs and shawls to his very nose. I arranged all that with my own hands. He looked like an ambassador from all the Russias."

"How kind of you to think of such things!" said Diana gratefully.

"And tell me why should I not think of such things? Do you imagine that it is not a pleasure to me to wait upon your father—for your sake?"

There was some amount of awkwardness in this kind of thing. Diana busied herself with the removal of her hat and jacket, which she laid neatly upon a stony-hearted horsehair sofa. After doing this she placed herself near the window, whence she contemplated the dusky street, appearing much interested in the movements of the lamp-lighter.

"What an admirable way they have of lighting the lamps now!" she remarked, with the conversational brilliance which usually marks this kind of situation; "how much more convenient it must be than the old method with a ladder, you know!"

"Yes, I have no doubt," said Gustave, bringing himself to her side with a couple of steps, and planting himself deliberately in a chair next to hers; "but don't you think, as I start for Normandy to-morrow, we might talk of some-

thing more interesting than the lamp-lighter, Miss Paget?"

"I am ready to talk of anything you like," replied Miss Paget, with that charming assumption of unconsciousness which every woman can command on these occasions.

"You are very good. Do you know that when I persuaded your father to go out for an airing, I was prompted by a motive so selfish as to render the proceeding quite diabolical? Don't be alarmed! The doctor gave his permission for the airing, or I should not have attempted such a thing. Hypocrisy I am capable of, but not assassination. You cannot imagine the diplomacy which I exhibited; and all to what end? Can you imagine that?"

"No, indeed."

"That I might secure one half-hour's uninterrupted talk with you; and, unhappily, you are so late that I expect your father's return every minute. He was to be back again before dusk, and the appearance of the lamp-lighter demonstrates that the dusk has come. I have so

much to say, and so little time to say it; so much, Diane—"

She started as he called her thus, as if in that moment of surprise she would have risen from her chair by his side. She knew what was coming, and having expected nothing so desperate, knew not how to arrest the confession that she would fain have avoided hearing. M. Lenoble laid his hand firmly on hers.

"So much, Diane; and yet so little, that all can be told in three words. I love you."

"M. Lenoble!"

"Ah, you are surprised, you wonder, you look at me with eyes of sweet amazement! Dear angel, do you think it is possible to see you and not to love you? To see you once is to respect, to admire, to bow the knee before beauty and goodness; but to see you many times, as I have done, the patient consoler of an invalid and somewhat difficult father—ah, my sweet love, who is there so hard amongst mankind that he should escape from loving you, seeing all that?"

The question had a significance that the

speaker knew not. Who amongst mankind? Why, was there not one man for whom she would have been content to be the veriest slave that ever abnegated every personal delight for the love of a hard master? And he had passed her by, indifferent, unseeing. She had worshipped him on her knees, as it seemed to her; and he had left her kneeling in the dust, while he went on to offer himself, heart and soul, at another shrine.

She could not forget these things. The memory and the bitterness of them came back with renewed poignancy at this moment, when the voice of a stranger told her she was beloved.

"My dear one, will you not answer me?" pleaded Gustave, in nowise alarmed by Diana's silence, which seemed to him only the natural expression of a maidenly emotion. "Tell me that you will give me measure for measure; that you will love me as my mother loved my father—with a love that trouble and poverty could never lessen; with a love that was strongest when fate was darkest—a star which the dreary night

of sorrow could not obscure. I am ten years older than you by my baptismal register, Diane; but my heart is young. I never knew what love was until I knew you. And yet those who know me best will tell you that I was no unkind husband, and that my poor wife and I lived happily. I shall never know love again, except for you. The hour comes, I suppose, in every man's life; and the angel of his life comes in that appointed hour. Mine came when I saw you. I have spoken to your father, and have his warm approval. He was all encouragement, and hinted that I might be assured of your love. Had he sufficient justification for that half-promise, Diane?"

"He had none," Miss Paget answered gravely, "none except his own wishes. You have made me hear more than I wished to hear, M. Lenoble, for the treasure you offer me is one that I cannot accept. With all my heart I thank you for the love you tell me of. Even if it is, as I can but think it, a passing fancy, I thank you, nevertheless. It is sweet to win the love of a good

man. I pray you to believe that with all my heart and mind I honour your generous nature, your noble sympathy with the weak and friendless. If you can give me your friendship, you shall find how I can value a good man's regard; but I cannot accept your love."

"Why not?" asked Gustave, aghast.

"Because I cannot give you measure for measure; and I will not give you less."

"But in time, Diane, in time!"

"Time cannot show me your character in a nobler light than that in which I see it now. You do not lack the power to win a woman's heart, but I have no heart to give. If you will be my friend, time will increase my affection for you; but time cannot restore the dead."

"Which means that your heart is dead, Diane?"

"Yes," she answered, with unutterable sadness.

"You love someone younger, happier than I?"

"No, M. Lenoble; no one."

"But you have loved? Yes! A scoundrel, perhaps; a villain, who—"

A spasm of pain contracted his face as he looked at the girl's drooping head; her face, in that dim light, he could not see.

"Tell me this, Diane," he said presently in an altered voice; "there is no barrier between us, no irrevocable obstacle that must part us for ever? There is no one who can claim you by any right—" He paused; and then added, in a lower voice, "by any wrong?"

"No one," answered Miss Paget, lifting her head, and looking her lover full in the face. Even in that uncertain light he could see the proud, steady gaze that seemed the fittest answer of all doubts.

"Thank God!" he whispered. "Ah, how could I fear, even for one moment, that you could be anything but what you seem—the purest among the pure? Why, then, do you reject me? You do not love me, but you ask my friendship; you offer me your friendship, even your affection. Ah, believe me, if those are but real, time will

ripen them into love. Your heart is dead. Ah, why should that young heart be dead? It is not dead, Diane; it needs but the fire of true love to warm it into life again. Why should you reject me, since you tell me that you love me; unless you love another? What should divide us?"

"Shadows and memories," Diana replied mournfully,—"vague and foolish; wicked, perhaps; but they come between you and me, M. Lenoble. And since I cannot give you a whole heart, I will give you nothing."

"You have loved someone, someone who did not value your love? Tell me the truth, Diane; you owe me at least as much as that."

"I do owe you the truth. Yes; I have been very foolish. For two or three years of my life there was a person who was our daily companion. He travelled with us—with my father and me; and we saw many changes and troubles together. For a long time he was like my brother; and I doubt if many brothers are as kind to their sisters as he was to me. In his heart that feeling never

changed. He was always equally kind, equally careless. Once I deluded myself with the fancy that in his looks and tones, and even in his words, there was some deeper feeling than this careless brotherly kindness; but it was no more than a delusion. My eyes were opened rudely enough. I saw his heart bestowed elsewhere. Do not think that I am so weak, or so wicked, as to abandon myself to despair because I have been awakened from my foolish dream. I can look the realities of life in the face, M. Lenoble; and I have taught myself to wish all good things for the dear girl who has won the heart that I once thought was mine. The person I am speaking of can boast no superior graces of mind or person. He is only a very commonplace young man, with a certain amount of talent, a disposition inclined to good rather than to evil. But he was the companion of my girlhood; and in losing him it seems to me as if I had lost a part of my youth itself."

To Diana's mind this seemed the end of the discussion. She expected M. Lenoble to bow his

head to the inevitable, to utter a friendly farewell, and depart for his Norman home, convinced, if not satisfied. But the light-hearted, easy-tempered Gustave was not a lover of the despairing order, nor an easily-answered suppliant.

"And that is all!" he exclaimed in the cheeriest tone. "A companion of your girlhood for whom you had a girl's romantic fancy! And the memory of this unspeakable idiot—great Heaven! but how idiotic must this wretch have been, to be loved by you, and not even to know it!—the memory of this *last of the last* is to come between you and me, and divide us for ever? The phantom of this miserable, who could be loved by an angel without knowing it, is to lift its phantasmal hand and thrust me aside—me, Gustave Lenoble, a man, and not an idiot? Ah, thus we blow him to the uttermost end of the world!" cried M. Lenoble, blowing an imaginary rival from the tips of his fingers. "Thus we dismiss him to the arctic regions, the torrid zone—to the Caucasus, where await vultures to gnaw his liver—wherever earth is most remote and uncomfortable—he and the

bread-and-butter miss whom he prefers to my Diane!"

This manner of taking things was quite unexpected by Diana. It was much more pleasant than gloomy despair or sullen resentment; but it was, at the same time, much more difficult to deal with.

"He is gone!" cried Gustave presently; "he is on the topmost heights of Caucasus, and the vultures are sharpening their beaks! And now, tell me, Diane—you will be my wife, will you not? You will be a mother to my children? You will transform the old château of Côtenoir into a pleasant home? You will cease to live amongst strangers? You will come to those who will love and cherish you as their own, their dearest and best and brightest? You will give your poor old father a corner by your fireside? He is old, and needs a home for his last years. For his sake, Diane, for mine, for my children, let your answer be yes! Ah, not so fast!" he cried, as she was about to speak. "Why are you so quick to pronounce your fatal judgment? Think how much

depends on your reply—your father's happiness, my children's, mine!"

"It is of yours only I must think," Miss Paget answered earnestly. "You fancy it is so easy for me to say no. Believe me, it would be much easier to say yes. When you speak of my father's declining years, I, who know his weary life so well, would be hard of heart indeed if I were not tempted by the haven you offer. Every word that you say gives me some new proof of your goodness, your generosity. But I will not wrong you because you are generous. I shall always be your grateful friend; but you must seek elsewhere for a wife, M. Lenoble. You will have little difficulty in finding one worthier than I."

"I will seek nowhere else for a wife; I will have no wife but you. I have had a wife of other people's choosing; I will choose one for myself this time. Let us be friends, Diane, since your decision is irrevocable as the laws of Draco. You are stone, you are adamant; but no matter, we can be friends. Your father will be disappointed. But what then? He is no doubt accustomed to

disappointments. My daughters—for them it is a profound affliction to be motherless, but they must support it. Côtenoir must go to wreck and ruin a little longer—a few more rats behind the panelling, a few more moths in the tapestry, that is all. My children say, 'Papa, our home is not comfortable: all is upside-down;' and I reply, 'But what will you, my children? A home without a wife is always upside-down.' And then I take them between my arms, in weeping. It is a poignant picture to rend the heart. But what does it matter, Miss Paget? What is that verse of your grand Will?

> 'Blow, blow, thou wintry wind;
> And let go weep the stricken hind,
> While harts ungalled go play.'

Perhaps I have mixed him up, somehow; but the meaning is clear."

A hollow-sounding and somewhat awful cough heralded the approach of Captain Paget, who entered the room at this juncture. If the Captain had prolonged his first airing, after six weeks' confinement to the house, until this late period of the

afternoon, he would have committed an imprudence which might have cost him dearly. Happily, he had done nothing of the kind, but had reëntered the house unobserved while Diana and Gustave were conversing close to the window, having preferred to leave his fly at the end of the street, rather than to incur the hazard of interrupting a critical *tête-à-tête*. The interval that had elapsed since his return had been spent by the Captain in his own bedchamber, and in the immediate neighbourhood of the folding-doors between that apartment and the parlour. What he had heard had been by no means satisfactory to him; and if a look could annihilate, Miss Paget might have perished beneath the Parthian glance which her father shot at her as he came towards the window, with a stereotyped smile upon his lips, and unspeakable anger in his heart.

He had heard just enough of the conversation to know that Gustave had been rejected—Gustave, with Côtenoir and a handsome independence in the present, and the late John Haygarth's fortune in the future. Rejected by a penniless

young woman, who at any moment might find herself without a roof to shelter her from the winds of heaven! Was ever folly, madness, wickedness supreme as this?

Horatio trembled with rage as he took his daughter's hand. She had the insolence to extend her hand for the customary salutation. The Captain's greeting was a grip that made her wince.

"Good-night, Miss Paget," said Gustave gravely, but with by no means the despondent tone of a hopeless lover; "I——well, I shall see you again perhaps, before I go to Normandy. I doubt if I shall go to-morrow. I have my own reasons for staying—unreasonable reasons perhaps, but I shall stay."

All this was said in a tone too low to reach Captain Paget's ear.

"Are you going to leave us, Lenoble?" he asked in a quavering voice. "You will not stop and let Di give you a cup of tea, as usual?"

"Not to-night, Captain. Good-bye."

He wrung the old man's hand and departed.

Captain Paget dropped heavily into a chair, and for some minutes there was silence. Diana was the first to speak.

"I am glad your doctor considered you well enough to go out for a drive, papa," she said.

"Indeed, my dear," answered her father with a groan; "I hope my next drive may be in a different kind of vehicle—the last journey I shall ever take, until they cart away my bones for manure. I believe they do make manure from the bones of paupers in our utilitarian age."

"Papa, how can you talk so horribly! You are better, are you not? M. Lenoble said you were better."

"Yes, I am better, God help me!" answered the old man, too weak alike in mind and body to hide the passion that possessed him. "That is one of the contradictions of the long farce we call life. If I had been a rich man, with a circle of anxious relations and all the noted men of Savile-row dancing attendance round my bed, I daresay I should have died; but as I happen to be a penniless castaway, with only a lodging-house

drudge and a half-starved apothecary to take care of me, and with nothing before me but a workhouse, I live. It is all very well for a man to take things easily when he is ill and helpless, too weak even to think. *That* is not the trying time. The real trial arrives when a little strength comes back to him, and his landlady begins to worry him for her rent, and the lodging-house drudge gets tired of pitying him, and the apothecary sends in his bill, and the wretched high-road lies bare and broad before him, and he hears the old order to move on. The moving-on time has come for me, Di; and the Lord alone knows how little *I* know where I am to go."

"Papa, you are not friendless; even I can give you a little help."

"Yes," answered the Captain with a bitter laugh; "a sovereign once a quarter—the scrapings of your pittance! *That* help won't save me from the workhouse."

"There is M. Lenoble."

"Yes, there is M. Lenoble; the man who would have given me a home for my old age; he

told me so to-day—a home fit for a gentleman—for the position he now occupies is nothing compared to that which he may occupy a year hence. He would have received me as his father-in-law, without thought or question of my antecedents; and if I have not lived like a gentleman, I might have died like one. This is what he would have done for me. But do you think I can ask anything of him now, after you have refused him? I know of your refusal to be that man's wife. I heard—I saw it in his face. You—a beggar, a friendless wretch, dependent on the patronage of a stockbroker's silly wife—*you* must needs give yourself grand airs, and refuse such a man as that! Do you think such men go begging among young ladies like you, or that they run about the streets, like the roast-pigs in the story, begad, with knives and forks in their backs, asking to be eaten?"

The Captain was walking up and down the room in a fever of rage. Diana looked at him with sad, wondering eyes. Yes, it was the old selfish nature. The leopard cannot change his

spots; and the Horatio Paget of the present was the Horatio Paget of the past.

"Pray don't be angry with me, papa," said Diana sorrowfully; "I believe that I have done my duty."

"Done your fiddlesticks!" cried the Captain, too angry to be careful of his diction. "Your duty to whom? Did you happen to remember, miss, that you owe some duty to me, your father, but for whom you wouldn't be standing there talking of duty, like a tragedy queen? By Jove, I suppose you are too grand a person to consider my trouble in this matter! The pains I took to get Lenoble over to England. The way I made the most of my gout even, in order to have you about me. The way I finessed and diplomatised to bring this affair to a successful issue. And now, when I have succeeded beyond my hopes, you spoil everything, and then dare to stand before me and preach about duty. What do you want in a husband, I should like to know? A rich man? Lenoble is that. A handsome man? Lenoble is that. A gentleman, with good blood in

his veins? Lenoble comes of as pure a race as any man in that part of France. A good man? Lenoble is one of the best fellows upon this earth. What is it, then, that you want?"

"I want to give my heart to the man who gives me his."

"And what, in the name of all that's preposterous, is to prevent you giving Gustave Lenoble your heart?"

"I cannot tell you."

"No, nor anyone else. But let us have no more of this nonsense. If you call yourself a daughter of mine, you will marry Gustave Lenoble. If not —"

The Captain found himself brought to a sudden stop in his unconscious paraphrase of Signor Capulet's menace to his recalcitrant daughter, Juliet. With what threat could the noble Horatio terrify his daughter to obedience? Before you talk of turning your rebellious child out of doors, you must provide a home from which to cast her. Captain Paget remembered this, and was for the moment reduced to sudden and ignominious

silence. And yet there must surely be some way of bringing this besotted young woman to reason.

He sat for some minutes in silence, with his head leaning on his hand, his face hidden from Diana. This silence, this attitude, so expressive of utter despondency, touched her more keenly than his anger. She knew that he was mean and selfish, that it was of his own loss he thought; and yet she pitied him. He was old and helpless and miserable; so much the more pitiable because of his selfishness and meanness. For the heroic soul there is always some comfort; but for the grovelling nature suffering knows no counterbalance. The ills that flesh is heir to seem utterly bitter when there is no grand spirit to dominate the flesh, and soar triumphant above the regions of earthly pain. Captain Paget's mind, to him, was not a kingdom. He could not look declining years of poverty in the face: he was tired of work. The schemes and trickeries of his life were becoming very odious to him; they were for the most part worn out, and had ceased to pay. Of course he had great hopes, in any event, from

Gustave Lenoble; but those hopes were dependent on Gustave's inheritance of John Haygarth's estate. He wanted something more tangible than this—he wanted immediate security; and his daughter's marriage with Gustave would have given him that security, and still grander hopes for the future. He had fancied himself reigning over the vassals of Côtenoir, a far more important personage than the real master of that château. He had pictured to himself a *pied-à-terre* in Paris which it might be agreeable for him to secure, for existence in Normandy might occasionally prove *ennuyeux*. These things were what he meant when he talked of a haven for his declining years; and against the daughter who, for some caprice of her own, could hinder his possession of these things, he had no feeling but anger.

Diana compassionated this weak old man, to whose lips the cup of prosperity had seemed so near, from whose lips her hand had thrust it. He had been promised a home, comfort, respectability, friendship—"all that should accompany old age"—and she had prevented the fulfilment

of the promise. Heaven knows how pure her motives had been; but as she watched that drooping head, with its silvered hair, she felt that she had been cruel.

"Papa," she began presently, laying her hand caressingly upon her father's neck; but he pushed aside the timid, caressing hand—"papa, you think me very unkind, only because I have done what I believe to be right; indeed it is so, papa dear. In what I said to Gustave Lenoble this evening, I was governed only by my sense of right."

"Indeed!" cried the Captain, with a strident laugh; "and where did you pick up your sense of right, madam, I should like to know? From what Methodist parson's hypocritical twaddle have you learned to lay down the law to your poor old father about the sense of right? 'Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land,' miss. *That's* what your Bible teaches you; but the Bible has gone out of fashion, I daresay, since I was a young man; and your model young woman of the present generation taunts her father with her sense of

right. Will your sense of right be satisfied when you hear of your father rotting in the old-men's ward of a workhouse, or dying on the London stones?"

"I am not unfeeling, papa. With all my heart I pity you; but it is cruel on your part to exaggerate the misery of your position, as I am sure you must be doing. Why should your means of living fail because I refuse to marry M. Lenoble? You have lived hitherto without my help, as I have lived of late without yours. Nothing could give me greater happiness than to know that you were exempt from care; and if my toil can procure you a peaceful home in the future—as I believe it can, or education and will to work must go for nothing—there shall be no lack of industry on my part. I will work for you; I will indeed, papa—willingly, happily."

"When your work can give me such a home as Côtenoir—a home that one word of yours would secure for me—I will thank you."

"If you will only wait, papa, if you will only have patience —"

"'Patience! Wait! Do you know what you are talking about? Do you prate of patience, and waiting, and hope in the future to a man who has no future—to a man whose days are numbered, and who feels the creeping chills of death stealing over him every day as he sits beside his wretched hearth, or labours through his daily drudgery? I can live as I have always lived! Yes; but do you know, or care to know, that with every day life becomes more difficult for me? Your fine friends at Bayswater have done with me. I have spent the last sixpence I shall ever see from Philip Sheldon. Hawkehurst has cut me, like the ungrateful hound he is. When they have squeezed the orange, they throw away the rind. Didn't Voltaire say that, when Frederick of Prussia gave him the go-by? Heaven knows it's true enough; and now you, who by a word might secure yourself a splendid position—yes, I say splendid for a poor drudge and dependent like you, and insure a home for me—you, forsooth, must needs favour me with your high-flown sentiments about your sense of right,

and promise me a home in the future, if I will wait and hope! No, Diana, waiting and hoping are done with for me, and I can find a home in the bed of the river without your help."

"You would not be so wicked as to do that!" cried Diana, aghast.

"I don't know about the wickedness of the act. But, rely upon it, when my choice lies between the workhouse and the river, I shall prefer the river. The modern workhouse is no inviting sanctuary, and I daresay many a homeless wretch makes the same choice."

For some minutes there was silence. Diana stood with her elbows resting on the chimney-piece, her face covered with her hands.

"O, Lord, teach me to do the thing which is right!" she prayed, and in the next breath acted on the impulse of the moment.

"What would you have me do?" she asked.

"What anyone but an idiot would do of her own accord—accept the good fortune that has dropped into your lap. Do you think such luck as yours goes begging every day?"

"You would have me accept Gustave Lenoble's offer, no matter what falsehoods may be involved in my acceptance of it?"

"I can see no reason for falsehood. Anyone but an idiot would honour such a man; anyone but an idiot would thank Providence for such good fortune."

"Very well, papa," exclaimed Diana, with a laugh that had no mirthful music, "I will not be the exceptional idiot. If M. Lenoble does me the honour to repeat his offer—and I think from his manner he means to do so—I will accept it."

"He shall repeat it!" cried the Captain, throwing off his assumption of the tragic father. The Œdipus Coloneus, the Lear—the venerable victim of winter winds and men's ingratitude—was transformed in a moment into an elderly Jeremy Diddler, lined with Lord Foppington. "He shall repeat it; I will have him at your feet to-morrow. Yes, Di, my love, I pledge myself to bring that about, without compromise to your maidenly pride or the dignity of a Paget. My dear child, I ought to have known that reflection

would show you where your duty lies. I fear I have been somewhat harsh, but you must forgive me, Di; I have set my heart on this match, for your happiness as well as my own. I could not stand the disappointment; though I admired, and still admire, the high feeling, and all that kind of thing, which prompted your refusal. A school-girlish sentimentality, child, but with something noble in it; not the sentimentality of a vulgar school-girl. The blue blood will show itself, my love; and now—no, no, don't cry. You will live to thank me for to-night's work; yes, my child, to thank me, when you look round your comfortable home by and by—when my poor old bones are mouldering in their unpretending sepulchre—and say to yourself, 'I have my father to thank for this. Adverse circumstances forbade his doing his duty as happier fathers are allowed the privilege of doing theirs, but it was his forethought, his ever-watchful care, which secured me an admirable husband and a happy home.' Mark my words, the time will come when you will say this, my dear."

"I will try to think of you always kindly, papa," Miss Paget answered, in a low sad voice; "and if my marriage can secure your happiness and Gustave Lenoble's, I am content. I only fear to take too much, and give too little."

"My love, you must certainly be the lineal descendant of Don Quixote. Too much, and too little, forsooth! Let Lenoble find a handsomer woman, or a more elegant woman, by gad, elsewhere! Such a woman as a duke might be proud to make his duchess, by Jove! There shall be no sense of obligation on our side, my love. Gustave Lenoble shall be made to feel that he gets change for his shilling. Kiss me, child, and tell me you forgive me for being a little rough with you, just now."

"Forgive you?—yes, papa. I daresay you are wiser than I. Why should I refuse M. Lenoble? He is good and kind, and will give us a happy home. What more can I want? Do I want to be like Charlotte, to whom life seems all poetry and brightness?"

"And who is going to throw herself away

upon a penny-a-liner, by Jove!" interjected the Captain.

"Can *I* hope to be like that girl, with her happy ignorance of life, her boundless love and trust? O, no, no, papa; those things are not for me."

She laid her head upon her father's breast, and sobbed like a child. This was her second farewell to the man she had loved, the dreams she had dreamed. The Captain comforted her with a paternal embrace, but was as powerless to comprehend her emotion as if he had found himself suddenly called upon to console the sorrows of a Japanese widow.

"Hysterical," he murmured. "These noble natures are subject to that kind of thing. And now, my love," he continued, in a more business-like tone, "let us talk seriously. I think it would be very advisable for you to leave Bayswater, and take up your abode in these humble lodgings with me immediately."

"Why, papa?"

"The reason is sufficiently obvious, my love.

It is not right that you should continue to eat the bread of dependence. As the future wife of Gustave Lenoble—and, in this case, the word future means immediately —"

"Papa," cried Diana suddenly, "you will not hurry me into this marriage? I have consented for your sake. You will not be so ungenerous as to —"

"As to hurry you? No, my dear, of course not. There shall be no indecent haste. Your wishes, your delicate and disinterested motives, shall be consulted before all things; yes, my love," cried the Captain, sorely afraid of some wavering on the part of his daughter, and painfully anxious to conciliate her, "all shall be in accordance with your wishes. But I must urge your immediate removal from Bayswater; first, because M. Lenoble will naturally wish to see you oftener than he can while you are residing with people whose acquaintance I do not want him to make; and secondly, because you have no further need of Mrs. Sheldon's patronage."

"It has been kindness, affection, papa—never

patronage. I could not leave Mrs. Sheldon or Charlotte abruptly or ungraciously, upon any consideration. They gave me a home when I most bitterly needed one. They took me away from the dull round of schoolroom drudgery that was fast changing me into a hard, hopeless, joyless automaton. My first duty is to them."

The Captain's angry sniff alone expressed the indignation which this impious remark inspired.

"My next shall be to you and M. Lenoble. Let me give Mrs. Sheldon due notice of the change in our plans."

"What do you call due notice?" asked Horatio peevishly.

"A quarter's notice."

"O, indeed! Then for three months you are to dance attendance upon Mrs. Sheldon, while M. Lenoble is waiting to make you his wife."

"I must consult the wishes of my friends, papa."

"Very well, my dear," replied the Captain, with a sigh that was next of kin to a groan;

"you must please yourself and your friends, I suppose; your poor old father is a secondary consideration." And then, timeously mindful of the skirmish he had just had with his daughter, Captain Paget made haste to assure her of his regard and submission.

"All shall be as you please, my love," he murmured. "There, go into my room, and smooth your hair, and bathe your eyes, while I ring for the tea."

Diana obeyed. She found eau-de-cologne and the most delicate of Turkey sponges on her father's wash-handstand; jockey-club and ivory-backed brushes, somewhat yellow with age, but bearing crest and monogram, on his dressing-table. The workhouse did not seem quite so near at hand as the Captain had implied; but with these sanguine people it is but a step from disappointment to despair.

"What am I to tell Mrs. Sheldon, papa?" she asked, when she was pouring out her father's tea.

"Well, I think you had better say nothing, except that my circumstances have somewhat im-

proved, and that my failing health requires your care."

"I hate secrets, papa."

"So do I, my dear; but half-confidences are more disagreeable than secrets."

Diana submitted. She secretly reserved to herself the right to tell Charlotte anything she pleased. From that dear, adopted sister she would hide nothing.

"If M. Lenoble should repeat his offer, and I should accept it, I will tell her all," she thought. "It will make that dear girl happy to know that there is someone who loves me, besides herself."

And then she thought of the strange difference of fate that gave to this Charlotte Halliday, with her rich stepfather and comfortable surroundings, a penniless soldier of fortune for a lover, while to her, the spendthrift adventurer's daughter, came a wealthy suitor.

"Will hers be the dinner of herbs, and mine the stalled ox?" she thought. "Ah, Heaven forbid! Why is it so difficult to love wisely, so easy to love too well?"

She remembered the cynical French proverb, "When we cannot have what we love, we must love what we have." But the cynical proverb brought her no comfort.

She went back to Bayswater with a strange, bewildered feeling; after having promised her father to go to Omega-street whenever he sent for her. There was no actual pain in her mind, no passionate desire to recall her promise, no dread horror of the step to which she had pledged herself. The feeling that oppressed her was the sense that such a step should have been the spontaneous election of her grateful heart, proud of a good man's preference, instead of a weak submission to a father's helplessness.

END OF VOL. I.

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